

REVOLUTION IN THE ARAB WORLD

TUNISIA, EGYPT, AND THE UNMAKING OF AN ERA

A SPECIAL
REPORT FROM





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REVOLUTION IN THE ARAB WORLD

TUNISIA, EGYPT, AND THE UNMAKING OF AN ERA

*Exclusive coverage of the turmoil in the Middle East—
as it's happening. By the world's leading experts
and journalists on the ground.*

A Middle East Channel Production

Edited by Marc Lynch, Susan B. Glasser, and Blake Hounshell

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from Erin Aulov and Andrew Hughey*

*“What is the perfect day for Hosni Mubarak?
A day when nothing happens.”*

—Egyptian joke, December 2010

*“A bunch of incognizant, ineffective
young people”*

—Egyptian Interior Minister Habib al-Adly
on the Tahrir Square protesters, Jan. 25, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

The Arab revolutions of 2011 have already overturned the false edifice of stability that had masked the furious changes sweeping across the region. It is far too soon to know whether they will produce real transitions to democracy, renewed authoritarian rule, or an era of instability and unending street politics. Nor is it yet clear how this new popular energy will affect the great issues of power politics in the region, from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the nuclear standoff with Iran.

But the dizzying changes that have toppled two of the world's most entrenched leaders in the space of weeks this winter have already fundamentally challenged assumptions about the region, not to mention reshape politics for decades to come. This collection of essays, originally published on ForeignPolicy.com, represents a first effort to assess, interpret, analyze, and understand the whirlwind of change—and thanks to the possibilities of our new digital era, to do so in real time, as the revolutions continue to unfold. We promise more updates, both of this ebook and every day on the Middle East Channel, a special section of Foreign Policy's award-winning website.

It is commonly said that nobody saw these revolutions coming. But this is not exactly right. For years, Middle East experts have been warning of the corrosive effects of entrenched authoritarianism and the rising frustrations of a disenfranchised youth bubble. With each gerrymandered and fraudulent election, each arrest of dissident bloggers and journalists, each report of youth unemployment and crisis of human development, each crackdown on legitimate protests, they sounded warnings. But these constant warn-

ings of impending crisis fell on deaf ears precisely because the predictions never seemed to come to pass. Authoritarian Arab regimes seemed all too capable of holding on to their power and protesters unable to break through to spark mass revolt.

If the problems were clear, it's true that few saw these particular waves of protest coming. At first, the unrest in Tunisia that began on Dec. 17 appeared more of the same. When the demonstrations began to pose a real challenge to Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, few thought that they could spread to other Arab countries. When upheaval began to break out across the region, from Egypt to Yemen and Jordan, most thought that Arab regimes would be well-prepared to avoid suffering the Tunisian president's fate. A decade of watching protests across the region fail to dislodge autocratic regimes left observers wary and skeptical. The power and success of the protests sparked by Tunisia took everyone by surprise—not least the protesters themselves.

It is far too soon to offer confident conclusions about why these protests succeeded where so many others had failed. But some things seem clear even now. Youth movements drew on the experience of a decade of protest and managed to bring mass publics into the streets in the face of very real repression and fears. The demonstration effect from Tunisia was far more powerful than most political scientists expected. Al Jazeera almost certainly played a decisive role in bringing the Tunisian and then Egyptian stories to the broader Arab public, casting them as a dramatic new chapter in the ongoing struggle for change that had always been central to the network's agenda. Social media, from Facebook and YouTube to SMS networks, gave powerful weapons to those organizing protests and helped them shape international views of their struggle. The United States played an important role in Egypt, particularly, by restraining the military from massive repression and urging the regime to begin a real, immediate transition.

The essays in this volume represent only the beginning of the story; they mark our first, unfolding efforts to understand a process very much in its opening phase. For now, of course, we are left with more questions than answers: Will Arab regimes, frightened by Egypt and Tunisia, respond with the old game of repression and co-optation, or will they begin real reforms? Will the new Egypt and Tunisia move toward democracy, or will they succumb to a rebranded authoritarianism? Could protest morph into chaos,

dangerous instability succeeding heavy-handed stability as the region's new norm? And what about the daunting needs of the Arab people—will these new regimes find better ways to meet them than the autocrats they displaced? And finally, of course, there are the many questions about how these upheavals will affect an international order already all too focused on the region's many problems. What happens to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the American alliances in the region—and its place in the world?

Stay tuned. And in the meantime, we hope you find this unique ebook helpful as the drama unfolds. Think of it as a guidebook to Revolution in the Arab World.

—Marc Lynch, *associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and co-editor of the Middle East Channel on ForeignPolicy.com.*

SO MUCH TO BE ANGRY ABOUT

BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

On Dec. 17, 2010, a 26-year-old street vendor in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid poured gasoline on his head and lit himself on fire.

The desperate act by Mohamed Bouazizi, who snapped after being humiliated by a bribe-seeking policewoman, has resonated deeply not only in Tunisia, but across the Arab world, inspiring millions of frustrated young people to rise up against their autocratic rulers. There are nearly endless recruits for this revolution in a region where as much as 60 percent of the population is under age 25, and they have much to be angry about.

Besides oil and natural gas, the Arab world today exports little of economic value. Its public sectors are inefficient, bloated, and rife with corruption. Unemployment rates are well into the teens. For the last three decades, the region has experienced hardly any economic development at all. In real terms, per capita GDP grew just 0.5 percent per year in Arab countries from 1980 to 2004, according to World Bank statistics. Most Arab regimes, ruling over artificial states and with questionable legitimacy, maintain power only through brute force.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, in which 19 Arab men hijacked planes and crashed them into the symbols of American political and economic power, the world began to pay attention. U.S. President George W. Bush vowed to spread liberty to every corner of the globe; his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, declared in a major 2005 speech in Cairo: “For 60 years, the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East—and we achieved neither.”

But Bush’s “Freedom Agenda” was met almost uniformly with suspicion

by Arabs, not least because they saw democracy being delivered at gunpoint in Iraq, rather than being grown from within. Arab regimes took advantage of the outrage over the war, as well as the growing threat of terrorism, to clamp down further on their restive populations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, long the burning issue in Arab politics, raged quietly, with no solution in sight. And when Islamist parties dominated elections in Egypt and the Palestinian territories, the United States suddenly lost its brief ardor for Arab democracy.

Now, after years of stagnation, the long-dormant Arab street has finally awakened. It took just under a month for protesters to dislodge Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, and only 18 days for Egyptian demonstrators to drive their leader of three decades, Hosni Mubarak, from power. Both men were once thought to be pillars of the American-backed “stability” in the region, bulwarks against terrorism and chaos. It took unheralded, underestimated youth movements to show just how brittle their rule really was.

In Egypt, the revolutionaries who occupied Tahrir Square for three weeks have gone home, and key political leaders—such as the liberal politician Ayman Nour—say their main demands are being met. Mubarak, his rigged parliament, and his anti-democratic constitution are gone, and the country is in the early days of a momentous transition, still under military rule yet experimenting with newfound freedoms as ordinary Egyptians begin discussing politics openly for the first time. The military, for the most part welcomed by the demonstrators as the least tainted of Egypt’s pre-crisis institutions, has promised to hand over power to an elected, civilian government in six months’ time.

Yet the fall of Mubarak represents only the partial collapse of his regime. Many top figures have left the hated National Democratic Party, which saw its headquarters burned during the protests on Jan. 28, but its vast electoral machine still exists. Hundreds of mini-Mubarak—heavy-handed provincial governors and corrupt local officials—control the provinces. The Interior Ministry, though much diminished, still operates, as does Mubarak’s feared state security apparatus. His final cabinet, led by a former Air Force officer with close ties to Mubarak, has not been replaced, and it’s not clear what role Vice President Omar Suleiman will play going forward.

In other words, there are no guarantees that “Mubarakism without Mubarak” won’t make a comeback. All we have is the word of an unelected junta led by generals installed by Mubarak himself. The Egyptian military has spoken out against labor strikes, which have spread across the country as thousands of state workers—including, incredibly, police officers seeking higher wages—have seized the moment to press their own demands. If the strikes escalate, watch out: Egypt could be headed for a period of extended instability rather than democratic consolidation. The type of turmoil seen in Tunis, where wave after wave of protests has led to a revolving door of high-level resignations and recriminations, might well follow in Cairo.

Not that outsiders can do much to intervene. As unrest spreads from Morocco to Bahrain, fanned by satellite television and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the unsustainable old order is crumbling. In the face of tear-gas grenades, police batons, and mass arrests, Arabs everywhere are conquering their fears and demanding free and fair elections, better schools and health care, clean government, and economic opportunity. Clearly what happened in Tunisia and in Egypt, the beating heart of the Arab world, won’t stay there.

Yet the revolutionaries in Cairo had a few unique advantages. Alongside its massive state media apparatus, among the world’s largest, Egypt boasted independent newspapers and a robust, if embattled civil society that had learned much in its years of working against the regime. Egyptian reporters and pundits were often hassled, but they could write what they wanted as long as they didn’t cross certain red lines, such as discussing the president’s health or delving too deeply into corrupt business deals. The Internet was monitored, but not censored outright. Hundreds of foreign reporters had experience and contacts in Egypt and could get the word out. And given the close ties between the Pentagon and the Egyptian military, the United States had leverage that may have helped prevent a far nastier crackdown. Other protest movements won’t be so lucky.

Going forward, opposition leaders in other Arab countries will have to find their own paths to victory; simply setting a date and calling for people to go to the streets won’t work. And they now face terrified rulers who see clearly that they need to adapt—though none will give up an iota of any real power. Some, like the wealthy monarchs in Bahrain and Kuwait, will

attempt to defuse any “Tunisia effect” by doling out piles of cash, while others, such as Jordan’s King Abdullah II, sack their governments and once again vow political reform. The worst of the bunch, like Libya’s Muammar al-Qaddafi and Syria’s Bashar Assad, will opt for deeper repression.

Change is finally coming to the Arab world. The only question is: How fast and how painful will it be?

Blake Hounshell is managing editor of Foreign Policy. He covered the Egyptian revolution from Cairo for the magazine.

CHAPTER 1

Rumblings of Revolution



CAIRO, JAN. 25, 2011 (BY MOHAMMED ABED/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

“Azrael, the archangel of death, comes down to Hosni Mubarak and tells him he must say goodbye to the Egyptian people. ‘Why, where are they going?’ he asks.”

— Egyptian joke, quoted in “Making Fun of Pharaoh,”
Issandr El Amrani

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INTRODUCTION

The rumblings of revolution in the Arab world were not difficult to hear, fueled as they were by political stagnation, crumbling public services, endemic police brutality, mass unemployment, a building sense of failure and humiliation. Across the Middle East, populations bulging with restive, angry youth dreaming of better lives were ruled by geriatric tyrants. For years, the only question had been when they would explode, not if.

And yet even those who should have known better refused to acknowledge reality. On Jan. 25, 2011, the day Egypt's revolt began, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people"—an assertion that managed to be as politically inastute as it was factually untrue.

After the aborted "Arab Spring" of 2005-2006 and the failed 2009 uprising in Iran—both of which were swiftly crushed by the regimes—many argued that the peoples of the Middle East simply weren't ready for change, or that the region's many autocrats were too wily or too powerful to be unseated. Scenes of smiling Iraqis waving purple fingers were quickly subsumed by images of sectarian carnage and bearded Islamists burning American flags. Perhaps the region was doomed to a dark future of violence, dictatorship, and backwardness? But what many missed, as Karim Sadjadpour argued in a moving June 2010 essay about the Green Movement, is that the biggest political grouping in Iran, and perhaps the Middle East, is the "party of the wind"—fence sitters who may not like their regime, but are willing to accommodate it as long as it seems strong. And right now, the winds of change are blowing at gale force.

JANUARY 2010: AFTER PHARAOH

BY ISSANDR EL AMRANI

Of all the crises that threaten to shake Barack Obama's presidency, few are more volatile than the ticking time bomb in Egypt, especially terrifying for the very reason that no one knows when it might explode. Hosni Mubarak, the 81-year-old former Air Force marshal who has ruled Egypt as a police state since 1981, might leave office sooner than anyone is expecting, opening a power vacuum that could send this U.S. ally, its 83 million citizens, and the regional political order spiraling into a fragile and potentially paralyzing tailspin.

Or he might not. Mubarak might well linger on for a few more years. Either way, the time bomb will be looming over Egypt for the foreseeable future, and Obama's fortunes in the Middle East will be determined in large part by whether this bomb explodes or gets detonated gently. It's not likely that Mubarak will go down voluntarily. In 2004, he told the Egyptian parliament that he will serve as president "until the last breath in my lungs and the last beat of my heart." Despite incessant rumors of his ill health, he doesn't seem close to those eventualities.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood—the only opposition group worth mentioning—is waiting in the wings. And the Egyptian regime is so wary of what could happen if Mubarak were suddenly removed from power that, according to one Western intelligence official, it has a detailed plan for shutting down Cairo to avoid a coup, fine-tuned to the detail of playing mournful Quranic verses on state television. Mubarak has never tapped a successor, so interim officials will take over the government to provide short-term continuity and prepare for emergency elections. If they happen, such elections are sure to bring more turmoil.

Due to carefully manufactured quirks in the Egyptian Constitution, the most likely candidate to win is the president's son, Gamal Mubarak, turning Egypt into a hereditary republic—a “republarchy,” as Egyptian-American political scientist and exiled dissident Saad Eddin Ibrahim warned in 2000. Gamal might be acceptable to Egypt's business class, but he is not popular. If he assumes the presidency, it could easily trigger a coup, be it an old-fashioned military takeover or a nonviolent “velvet” one that parachutes a senior military officer to the top of the ruling party. The irony of Egypt's predicament is that it is often the self-described democrats of the opposition who advocate such an intervention by the armed forces, thinking that military rule could provide a steppingstone to democracy. Gamal, on the other hand, promises another Mubarak presidency for life.

Throughout this troubled transition, Egyptian initiatives in the region, such as Cairo's attempts to reconcile the Palestinian factions of Fatah and Hamas and its involvement in the Sudanese peace process, would be frozen. Key allies such as the United States and Saudi Arabia, as well as neighbors like Israel, will worry that the situation could take a turn against their interests and might be tempted to interfere. But they'll be working in the dark: The U.S. State Department is ill-prepared for Hosni Mubarak's departure, former officials from George W. Bush's administration say. When the moment does come, U.S. diplomats will be scrambling to understand the fate of their largest Arab ally, one whose ready cooperation has been central to U.S. designs in the region for nearly three decades.

Bad as this all may seem, the alternative could be even uglier: that Mubarak will hang on to power, run for a sixth term in 2011, and go on ruling the country into advanced age. The example of Habib Bourguiba, who remained president of Tunisia for 30 years until he was removed through a “medical coup” at age 84, comes to mind. That may yet be the worst outcome for Egypt: a prolongation of the current uncertainty, with a president increasingly frail and unable to govern—leading a regime whose moral authority erodes and where centers of powers multiply, with no end in sight.

Issandr El Amrani is a Cairo-based writer and consultant who blogs at The Arabist.

JUNE 2010: EVEN IRAN'S REGIME HATES IRAN'S REGIME

BY KARIM SADJADPOUR

Even before last year's post-election tumult, it was palpable to almost anyone who had spent serious time in Iran that revolutionary rot had set in long ago. While every country has its tales of corrupt clergymen, disillusioned government officials, drug-addicted youth, and rampant prostitution, in a theocracy that rules from a moral pedestal these stories have long served to highlight the government's hypocrisy and hollow legitimacy.

Although Iran's amateur cell-phone journalists did a heroic job chronicling scenes of extraordinary courage and harrowing government brutality—a record that is “more important than all of the history of our cinema,” as acclaimed filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf graciously put it in a Wall Street Journal interview—what is impossible to capture on video is the dismay of Iran's traditional classes who continue to believe strongly in Islam, but have lost their faith in the Islamic Republic.

Growing up in a household where my devoutly religious, veiled grandmother had an aversion to Shiite clergy, I learned from a young age that piety was not always, indeed not often, an indicator of support for theocracy. Two decades later, based in Tehran with the International Crisis Group, I came to learn through daily interaction with Iranian officials that they, too, had their doubts.

While jumping through bureaucratic hoops at the Iranian Foreign Ministry several years ago to retrieve my confiscated passport (a wrist slap compared with what many of my contemporaries later endured), I was taken aback to find that nearly every office I entered had BBC Persian or Rooz—

considered subversive, anti-government websites, which are now filtered—on their computer screens.

In meetings, especially with Western officials, Iranian officials would parrot the party line. But in private conversations, out of earshot of their bosses, a different narrative could often be heard. A former Iranian ambassador in Asia once confided to me over dinner in Paris that as “naïve” young revolutionaries, he and his friends had grossly underestimated how difficult it would be to govern Iran and satisfy its fickle population. “We didn’t appreciate at the time,” I was surprised to hear him say, “the enormous challenges the shah had to deal with.”

I used to recount these tales to a friend of mine, a devout, American-educated professor of political science at Tehran University who ran in government circles. He would smile and recount for me his own stories. “Everyone hates the regime,” he told me once, only half-jokingly. “Even the regime hates the regime.”

The revolutionary slogans that once inspired a generation of Iranians have become banal background noise for a population born predominantly after the revolution. Amid the bustle of a Friday prayer ceremony in Tehran several years back, I saw a rumpled, 50-something man furiously pumping his fist up and down and chanting something unintelligible. No one seemed to pay any attention to him. As he passed me, his words became clearer:

“Marg bar Amrika peechgooshtee sadt toman! Marg bar Amrika peechgooshtee sadt toman!”

“Death-to-America screwdrivers, 100 toman! Death-to-America screwdrivers, 100 toman!”

I was curious to check out his merchandise—cheaply priced, anti-imperialist household tools—so I flagged him down. Sensing his first sale, his eyes lit up.

“How many do you want?” he asked enthusiastically. He had a basket of at least 30. I grabbed one and took a closer look. Turning the screwdriver in my hand, I searched in vain for the words “Death to America.”

“Where is the ‘Death to America?’” I asked.

He shot me a puzzled look. “You want one with ‘Death to America’ written on it?”

“Isn’t that what you said?”

“That was just an advertisement!” he explained to me with a wave of the hand, incredulous at my naiveté. “I said, ‘Death to America! Screwdrivers for 100 toman!’” Two altogether separate sentences, he argued. The small crowd we had attracted shared his incredulity and verified that there indeed had been a pause between the two phrases.

“Come back next week,” he said. “Perhaps I’ll have some for you then.” (Sharia has not yet replaced the laws of supply and demand in Iran.)

Many close observers of Iran confess to being baffled at the country’s complex politics, its internal contradictions, its cultural nuances. How is it, many wonder, that a system that has profoundly underperformed for three decades could remain in power?

The leaders of the opposition Green Movement are no doubt pondering this question. At the height of the 2009 unrest, they had hoped to recruit Iran’s disaffected officialdom and traditional classes. Some joined last summer, but many watched, and continue to watch, from the sidelines. “They wanted to see the Green Movement succeed,” said my friend, the university professor. “But they won’t make a move until things are really on the verge of change. They’re afraid.”

Too often we underestimate the sustainability of morally bankrupt regimes that have mastered the art of repression coupled with financial co-optation. In the cynical words of a scion of a powerful clerical family, who told me once: “When you have control over the oil revenue, you can run this country with a few million supporters and 20,000 people who are willing to kill and die for you.” Maybe, though that formula did not work for the shah.

There is some wisdom in the old adage that Iran’s largest political party is the hezb-e baad, the “party of the wind.” Iranians have historically gravitated toward where the most powerful political winds are blowing. As anti-government demonstrations engulfed Tehran last summer, I thought of the sloganeering screwdriver salesman from Friday prayers.

“Death to the Dictator!” I pictured him saying, crying to the parched crowds. “Watermelon juice for 500 toman!”

That likely didn’t happen. Not just yet. But maybe one day soon.

Karim Sadjadpour is an associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

JUNE 2010: THE HOLLOW ARAB CORE

BY MARC LYNCH

“So the Arab core grows hollow,” laments former Bush administration Middle East advisor Elliott Abrams in the *Weekly Standard*. Most of the essay is an unexceptional restatement of neoconservative tropes: Obama is weak, Arabs only respect power, Turkey has become a radical Islamist enemy ... you can fill in the rest of the blanks. But the lament about the hollowness of the Arab core deserves more careful attention. Why has the Arab core grown so hollow? After all, the Arab core—in his definition, mostly Egypt and Saudi Arabia—has been closely aligned with the United States for many decades, and its leaders cooperated very closely with the Bush administration on virtually every issue. This points to a contradiction at the core of Abrams’s approach. The cooperation by these Arab leaders, in the face of widespread and deep hostility toward those policies among much of the Arab public, contributed immensely toward stripping away their legitimacy and driving them into ever greater repression. The approach outlined so ably by Abrams isn’t the solution to the problem of this “hollow Arab core.” It is one of its causes. And the problem with the Obama administration’s regional diplomacy thus far has been that it has changed too little ... not that it has changed too much.

To explain the feebleness of the Arab core compared to Turkey and Iran, Abrams focuses primarily on the advancing age of Hosni Mubarak and Saud al-Faisal. Twenty years ago, he argues, these were men to be feared. But now they are unable to muster the same persuasive powers and have no obvious replacements. As a result of their dwindling powers, he suggests, Qatar’s relatively young foreign minister and “clever, unprincipled, energetic actors” such as Turkey’s Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Foreign

Minister Ahmet Davutoglu can drive the agenda. This is an oddly personalized view of diplomacy. Qatar's diplomacy may be clever, but its ability to deploy its staggering wealth probably makes others inclined to appreciate its cleverness. Turkish leaders may be smart and energetic, but they also command a country with a powerful military and robust economy, membership in NATO, and real and growing soft power appeal across the region.

The advancing age of a few individuals is not a satisfying explanation for the declining influence of Arab leaders. States like Egypt and Saudi Arabia have lost influence not only because of their leaders' old age, but also because of the deep unpopularity of many of their U.S.-backed policies. If Hosni Mubarak were more vigorous, Egypt's role in enforcing the blockade of Gaza would not become any more attractive to most Arabs. Abrams, who has long been a vocal advocate of democracy promotion in the Middle East, would likely agree that the stultifying repression in these countries has impeded the emergence of new leaders. But he, like many neoconservative advocates of democracy promotion, rarely addresses head-on the reality that the policies pursued by these friendly autocrats in support of U.S. policy objectives contribute deeply to the unpopularity of those regimes. The Arab core has been hollowed out in large part because of, not in spite of, its role in American foreign policy.

The Bush administration sought to polarize the Middle East into an axis of "moderates"—grouping Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and other like-minded Sunni autocrats with Israel—against "radicals" such as Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The moderate Arab leaders mostly went along, cooperating to a considerable degree in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and siding against Hezbollah in the 2006 Israeli war with Lebanon and against Hamas during the 2008 Israeli attack on Gaza. But public opinion was largely on the other side, with broad majorities of the population in most of those Arab countries angrily denouncing both the Israeli wars and their own leaders for the positions they took in line with American preferences. To contain this popular anger and to continue to help American policies (such as Egypt's enforcing the blockade of Gaza), those Arab regimes became increasingly repressive. It is not an accident that after all the Bush administration's rhetoric about democracy promotion, it had almost completely abandoned such efforts by early 2006, after the electoral victory by Hamas. Its legacy is a

Middle East considerably less democratic than when it took office.

The failure of the Obama administration thus far is not that it has been insufficiently aggressive, a “fierce and certain ally [that] gives moderates strength and radicals pause.” It is that it has not changed enough. It has too often remained locked in the Bush administration’s framework of moderates and radicals and has failed to truly take advantage of the opportunities offered by energetic new actors such as Turkey and Qatar. The growing Arab disenchantment with Obama is rooted in the widespread belief that U.S. policies have not changed very much from the Bush years despite the improved rhetoric.

Turkey and Qatar could have been valuable interlocutors for the United States in pursuing a grand bargain with Iran based on common interests across the region or for exploring peace opportunities between Israel and Syria (as the Turks had already been trying to accomplish, with some success). The U.S. might have sought their help in brokering an intra-Palestinian reconciliation and reunifying the West Bank and Gaza.

But for the most part, the Obama administration chose to fall back on the conventional policies of the past: Palestinian reconciliation remained in the hands of an enfeebled and partisan Egypt, the grand bargain with Iran faded from an agenda dominated by the nuclear question and sanctions, and the Turks are now seen as more of a problem than an asset. Breaking through some of these intractable problems will require not going back to the failed approach of the Bush administration, but rather rediscovering the genuine conceptual changes that Obama originally brought to the table.

JUNE 2010: 'REFORM,' SAUDI STYLE

BY TOBY C. JONES

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, the energetic octogenarian who is in his fifth year as head of the oil-rich kingdom, has overcome divisions within the royal family and proceeded to restore stability to the kingdom, which just a few years ago was under siege by local radicals and wracked with fears about the possible regionalization of the Iraq war. For all his considerable political acumen, however, Abdullah has turned to an old playbook to consolidate the House of Saud's authority—leaving important questions about what comes next for the kingdom unanswered.

Amid political uncertainty, Abdullah has taken measured steps to transform his country. Abdullah's Saudi Arabia is a remarkably different place than that of his immediate predecessor. With his blessing, the Saudi press, while hardly free, is occasionally vibrant and sometimes even critically introspective. Some of the kingdom's most sacred institutions and practices, including the reactionary religious establishment and the draconian restrictions imposed on women, have come under fire in the media by a growing number of Saudi journalists, intellectuals, and activists. Saudi citizens have been taking their cues directly from the king, who has worked to rein in the clergy, which has enjoyed tremendous power since the kingdom took a conservative turn in the late 1970s.

Perhaps most importantly, Abdullah has led the charge in an effort to develop and promote a sense of Saudi identity. For decades, the kingdom's leaders neglected to foster anything resembling Saudi nationalism. Since

2003, Abdullah and his supporters have attempted to promote national unity through the institution of the National Dialogue, a conference that gives Saudi citizens an opportunity to raise issues affecting the kingdom.

Yet, despite the new levels of openness enjoyed by Saudi citizens, Abdullah is not leading the kingdom on the path to political liberalism. Just the opposite: While making small social and economic concessions, the king is in fact turning the clock back in Arabia, using his popularity to confront clergy and restore the kind of unchecked authority his family enjoyed in the 1970s. Although the royal family has been the preeminent political force in the Arabian Peninsula since the early 20th century, its supremacy was challenged in 1979 by the spectacular siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, which marked the rise of a generation of Islamist rebels. The kingdom's leaders responded by co-opting its radical critics. In doing so, they greatly expanded the power of the religious establishment.

Thirty years on, it is this bargain that Abdullah has begun to dismantle. And he is succeeding. Indeed, Abdullah's most important domestic accomplishment so far has been the strengthening of his and his family's grip on power.

Abdullah's consolidation of authority has clear global implications, even affecting Saudi Arabia's relationship with the United States. Although the longtime allies agree in principle on the importance of security in the Persian Gulf, it is not clear that they share a common vision for how best to achieve it. The Saudis continue to look to the U.S. military for protection from regional threats—even though, arguably, the American war machine has done much to destabilize the region in recent decades. In spite of security expectations and assurances, there is considerable uncertainty as to whether the two allies will continue to find common ground.

Ties between the two countries continue to be based primarily on the stable flow of Saudi oil to global markets and the flow of Saudi petrodollars into the pockets of U.S. weapons manufacturers. But while Saudi Arabia was once willing to do the United States' bidding, the kingdom under Abdullah has been a complicated ally, willing to use its oil power to push back gently against unpopular U.S. policies.

For instance, the Saudis opposed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, though they eventually provided some logistical support. More importantly, Abdul-

lah has refused to become actively involved in settling nerves in Iraq, forgiving debt accumulated under Saddam Hussein's regime, or helping restore political order. The usually reserved king even preferred to isolate the Shiite-led government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and stoke sectarian anxieties, rather than assisting U.S. efforts to stabilize the Iraqi political system.

The Saudis' frustration stemmed from their early realization that the war opened the door for Tehran's resurgence in Iraq and the renewal of the bitter Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The war also distracted from what many Saudis, including the king, consider the single most important political challenge facing the region: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Abdullah and other prominent Saudi leaders have insisted, rightly, that regional stability will remain elusive until progress is made on a political settlement between Palestinians and Israelis. And they will almost certainly continue to use whatever leverage they have—including their support, or lack thereof, of U.S. efforts in Iraq—to continue to push for movement on the Palestinian-Israeli front.

Future U.S. efforts to restrain Iran's purported development of nuclear weapons might meet with similar Saudi obstructionism. Mutual U.S.-Saudi concerns over Iran's growing influence, from Iraq to Lebanon and throughout the Persian Gulf, are no guarantee that Abdullah would support military action against the Islamic Republic. The Saudis have much to lose, particularly from any disruption of oil shipments in the gulf, or Iran's potential retaliation against their oil facilities in the region, a move that could accompany another conflict.

It is more likely that the Saudis want to see the Americans maintain a military presence in the region—though not on Saudi soil—preferring the demonstration of military force to its actual use. This would also represent a turning back of the clock to a time when the United States maintained a more robust presence on the Arabian Peninsula.

Abdullah's vision for Saudi Arabia is reminiscent of that of his half-brother Faisal, who ruled the kingdom from 1964 until his assassination in 1975. Respected at home as a reformer, confident in regional affairs, and willing to take on the United States, Faisal's era as monarch is viewed by many as the kingdom's golden age: a period of material prosperity and political strength. Abdullah may not welcome the comparison, however, as

Faisal's reign helped galvanize a generation of Saudi radicalism, creating the political order that he is trying to take apart.

There are no indications that a new wave of dissent is on the way, but by looking to re-create the past, rather than finding a way forward, the question of what will follow Abdullah should concern the kingdom—and its most important patron.

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JULY 2010: CAN EGYPT CHANGE?

BY STEVEN A. COOK

Sometimes it seems that the only things that change in Egypt are the police uniforms. In November, when temperatures dip into the 60s, they don black woolen outfits. A few months later, generally March, when it starts getting quite warm again, they switch back to their white cotton duds. Everything else seems to be just about the way it always was—my one-eyed barber sitting in the same chair today as the day I met him a decade ago; the guys from the *baqqel* across the street from where I used to live doing just about the same things as they did when I bid them farewell all those years ago; my doorman is still lording over his corner of Mohamed Mazhar Street, and Hosni Mubarak is still the president talking about “stability for the sake of development.” Yet, the president, who has worked with five U.S. counterparts, three of whom served two terms, is sick. Official denials aside, the timeline for succession is more likely 12 to 18 months rather than the three to five years that had been the working assumption until the president’s hospitalization in Germany last March.

Mubarak’s imminent demise has prompted analysts, policymakers, journalists, and other observers to ask, “Can Egypt change?” While the question seems apt at the twilight of the Mubarak era, it nevertheless seems oddly ahistoric.

Of course, Egypt can change. It changed in July 1952 when the Free Officers deposed King Farouk and a short time later disposed of their own initial efforts at reforming Egypt’s parliamentary system in favor of building an entirely new political order. Egypt changed in 1970 when Anwar Sadat succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser. Out went the statism, the “nonaligned align-

ment” with the Soviets, the Arab nationalism, and war with Israel. Change came again in October 1981 with Sadat’s assassination. Mubarak split the difference between his two predecessors—hanging onto Sadat’s economic liberalization or *infitah*, moving Cairo back toward the Arab mainstream (while not repudiating Sadat’s separate peace with Israel), and keeping Washington at arm’s length while continuing to secure its largesse. Beyond the big issues of Egypt’s foreign policy and ideological orientation, there have been less noticed social and socioeconomic changes in Egypt. When Mubarak took the oath of office on Oct. 14, 1981, the Egyptian population was 45.5 million, or slightly more than half of what it is today. Egypt’s gross domestic product was approximately \$40 billion; it now tops \$145 billion. There were only 430,000 telephone lines in the entire country; now there are approximately 11 million. The life expectancy of the average Egyptian was 57 years; it is now 70. The World Bank reports that in 1981 the literacy rate was less than 50 percent; now 66 percent of Egyptians can read. By a host of measures, life in Egypt has changed radically and for the better over the course of the three decades.

Yet in the category of “if everything seems so good, why do I feel so bad,” even with all the important socioeconomic changes that have occurred, the country’s trajectory nevertheless seems flat. Indeed, in the abstract, Egypt today looks much like the country the Free Officers took over 58 years ago—poor, dependent on a global power, and authoritarian. The central problem is the nature of Egypt’s political institutions. Nasser and his associates developed a set of political institutions—rules, regulations, and laws—in response to the internal political challenges they confronted consolidating their power in the months following the July 1952 coup. These rules, regulations, and laws were inherently anti-democratic, rigged to serve the interests of the officers along with their civilian allies, and they formed the basis for subsequent institutional development.

Those who benefited from this political order—the armed forces, regime intellectuals, bureaucracy, internal security services, and big business—have become a powerful constituency for autocracy. As long as the collective welfare of these groups remains connected to the regime, the kind of institutional change necessary for a more open and democratic political system is unlikely. That’s why the National Democratic Party’s “New Thinking and

Priorities” was never intended to do anything other than institutionalize the power of the ruling party under the guise of political change. Reform conflicts with the worldview and material interests of Egypt’s leaders and their constituents.

It is not just the formal institutions of the state, however, but a whole series of unwritten rules that shape the way Egyptians calculate what is in their best interests. To be sure, this is hardly unique to Egyptian society, but it nevertheless provides some insight into change and Egypt’s apparent resistance to it. There is a curious tendency for some reform-minded young professionals to throw their lot in with the regime, despite a professed desire for a fundamental transformation of Egyptian politics and society. Protestations abound about the desire to effect change from working within the state apparatus, but the reality is that the Egyptian regime manifests a powerful system of reward and punishment that encourages a measure of political conformity for those not willing to take their risks with Egypt’s vaunted internal security services.

The inevitable question, “What can we do about this?” is the *sine qua non* of all Washington policy discussions. The answer is: precious little. Institutional change is rare because it is hard and almost always associated with some sort of dramatic disequilibrium—defeat in war, revolution, or economic collapse. Yet, there are some things that outsiders can do, particularly in the context of Egypt’s looming succession, so that when Hosni Mubarak does take his last sail up the Nile, Washington has made it clear that it is on the side of transparency, free and fair elections, and nonviolence. Still, these kinds of declarations of principle are more about demonstrating good faith than they are likely to influence the thinking of Egypt’s new leader—who will be seeking to consolidate his hold on power and thus dependent on the very groups that have the strongest interest in maintaining the status quo.

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OCTOBER 2010: OUR MAN IN SANAA

BY ELLEN KNICKMEYER

SANAA, Yemen—The scene in Yemen's capital on Sept. 20, 2010, was almost embarrassing, according to those who looked on: John Brennan, the influential White House counterterrorism advisor, was trying to leave Sanaa after a fly-in, fly-out visit with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh about his country's burgeoning al Qaeda branch.

But Saleh was too busy pleading for U.S. cash to let the 25-year CIA veteran drive away, according to people familiar with Brennan's visit. Clutching Brennan by the arm, Yemen's burly president of 30-plus years stood at the open door of Brennan's limo, pressing his appeals that the United States pay up now, not later, on the \$300 million that Barack Obama's administration is planning to give Yemen over the near term to help it combat al Qaeda. (Someone finally eased shut the limo door on the Yemeni leader, allowing Brennan to get away, witnesses said.)

And everyone knows what will happen if Saleh doesn't get more free money, because it's a threat Saleh and his officials use at every opportunity to demand international aid: Without an urgent and unending infusion of foreign cash, it will lose its fight against the aggressive Saudi and Yemeni offshoots of al Qaeda that Saleh long allowed—though he doesn't admit that part of the story—to make their home here in Yemen.

"No friend of Yemen can stand by when the economy of that state comes close to collapse ... or when the authority of the government is challenged by extremism, by violence, by crime, or by corruption," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said on Sept. 24 in New York, striking the spunky, this-is-Yemen's-finest-hour theme at a "Friends of Yemen" conference of officials of roughly 30 countries gathered together to brainstorm propping

up the Arab world's poorest and most chaotic country despite Yemen's best efforts to collapse.

Yemeni Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Mujawar echoed the World War II theme when it came to hinting what kind of money international donors might want to drop on the dresser on the way out—that is, if they want Yemen to fight al Qaeda.

“Certainly, we need a Marshall Plan for supporting Yemen. I believe the amount needed is around 40 billion dollars,” Mujawar told the London-based *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper. (Yemen's annual GDP is a mere \$27 billion.)

Reviewing Yemen's recent history suggests a different idea: The big problem with Yemen isn't al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Nor is it the Zaidi Shiite rebellion in Yemen's north or the separatist movement in Yemen's south. It isn't the 40 percent unemployment. It isn't the near one-in-10 childhood mortality rate or the malnutrition that causes more than half the country's children to be stunted. Although all those factors exist, tragically, in this hospitable, ancient, and beautiful country, and all are grave, none of them is Yemen's main problem.

No, the big problem with Yemen is Yemen's president—Saleh.

The perpetually shortsighted corruption and mismanagement of Saleh and his circle have been such that almost everyone—Westerners, Yemen's Persian Gulf neighbors, many Yemenis—routinely use that word “collapse,” speculating more on the “when” than the “if.”

Yemen moved squarely to the front of U.S. security worries last December when a Nigerian allegedly trained by al Qaeda in Yemen tried to detonate a bomb on a Detroit-bound airliner. Ambitious and energetic, led in part by Saudi veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as the Yemeni branch is known, has launched almost daily attacks in the summer and early fall of 2010 on Yemeni security and intelligence forces. Some U.S. intelligence officials and others see Yemen's branch as the gravest threat to the United States, and U.S. Central Command said recently it wants to pump \$120 billion in military aid into Yemen over the coming years to help it fight al Qaeda.

U.S. State Department officials publicly have been more measured so far, saying they will direct more than \$100 million of the new nonmilitary aid to

building public services and civil society. Brennan, one of the most adamant in the Obama administration about the threat of al Qaeda in Yemen, made his trip here in September 2010 with a letter from Obama to Saleh calling the United States “committed” to helping Yemen.

No one doubts that the threat to Saleh’s government from the few hundred al Qaeda fighters here is real. But no one doubts, given Saleh’s history, that the Yemeni leader is trying to exploit that threat to gain foreign aid and squelch political opponents and dissidents.

The West, the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, and others have already put \$5.7 billion on offer to Yemen since 2006, as Yemen’s al Qaeda threat grew. But Saleh’s ineffective government has been unable to come up with concrete spending and monitoring plans that satisfy the donors. The Friends of Yemen conference was intended to sidestep those concerns and come up with a way to push development regardless, perhaps by establishing an additional development fund for the country.

What Yemen needs most isn’t more cash, though, but a government that spreads its cash to the people, rather than steals it. Military and domestic aid given without the strictest of conditions and oversight will only let Saleh’s government continue to ignore all pressure for reform, perpetuating the disaffection and suffering that sustain insurgencies and al Qaeda.

When it comes to short-sightedness regarding Yemen’s best interests, Saleh and his ruling family circle have demonstrated a near unerring propensity to err since he assumed the presidency in 1978, after leading a military coup in 1962. Since then, Saleh has built a power system based heavily on buying the goodwill of Yemen’s tribal leaders, allegedly paying them to deliver the votes of their people in election after election.

In the first Gulf War, Saleh cast what became known as the most expensive “no” in history—voting against international deployment to roll back Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. Yemen’s Gulf neighbors expelled Yemeni workers from their countries, lastingly depriving Yemen of remittances, the mainstay of its tiny economy.

The blunders continued. Saleh allowed al Qaeda members to make their homes here as long as they didn’t target his government (a gentleman’s agreement broken only in recent years). Instead of incorporating southern Yemenis after the 1994 north-south civil war, Saleh marginalized them, po-

litically and economically. Anger in the south has fed insurgencies and protests against Saleh's government, creating southern discontent that al Qaeda is now trying to exploit.

In 2004 when the Zaidis, a religiously oriented sect in Yemen's north, took up arms against the government, Saleh's military rocketed and mortared the cities and towns of the north, according to residents there—killing hundreds if not thousands of his people and doubling and doubling and doubling again the ranks of fighters for and supporters of the northern rebels.

Corruption—the theft of Yemeni public funds and foreign aid—is so rampant here it would make Afghan President Hamid Karzai blush. In a country with one of the highest child-mortality rates in the Middle East, where only about half the people have access to medical services, top government officials and low-ranking workers alike steal and waste half of the slim allocation that the government devotes to health care, according to the World Health Organization.

Saleh's government also has resisted significantly scaling back an outdated fuel-subsidy program that sucks up more than 10 percent of Yemen's GDP—perhaps because, according to Abdul-Ghani Iryani, a Yemeni development analyst, Saleh's cronies are skimming \$2 billion a year off the program for their own pockets.

Estimates are that Yemen, a country at peace with all its neighbors, spends from one-third to one-half of its budget on security and intelligence services, keeping a lid on its own people.

On the day Brennan visited, Yemeni forces with U.S. help staged an attack on an al Qaeda hideout in the southeast. But the siege ended with the showy Yemeni cordon of tanks, artillery, troops, and warplanes around the town of Huta somehow letting top al Qaeda leaders escape, as Yemeni forces did recently at another siege in the southern city of Lawdar.

Saleh's regime appears eager to use the influx of new military aid against its own people, persistently claiming that al Qaeda and Yemen's southern separatists are one. (Separatist leaders deny it; Saleh's regime has supplied no hard evidence; and most Westerners are skeptical.)

Saudi Arabia has been one of the worst enablers for Saleh's regime, bailing it out recently with a more than \$2 billion gift of cash just when grow-

ing money pressures had economists hoping Yemen might be forced into reform.

U.S. officials seem to be more properly cynical about Saleh and his claims, and working to try to monitor aid for special operations and critical social services.

But if Saleh continues to refuse and delay reforms, the United States and its allies should do something inconceivable in the can-do war on terror: back off and let Saleh feel the pain of his sucked-dry economy and thwarted people. Rather than trying to prop up another wobbly tyrant, as in Afghanistan, the United States would help most by allowing Yemen's citizens, and potentially better Yemeni leaders, to finally have a say.

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OCTOBER 2010: THE DEATH OF EGYPT'S FREE PRESS

BY DAVID KENNER

For years, the newspaper al-Dostour was one of the few independent voices in the Egyptian press. No longer: Its editor in chief, Ibrahim Eissa, was fired for refusing to toe the government line.

The immediate reason for Eissa's firing appears to be his plan to publish an article written by opposition leader and would-be presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei commemorating Egypt's 1973 war with Israel. But in an exclusive interview with Foreign Policy, Eissa said that his dismissal had been planned since the paper was purchased by Sayyid Badawi, a businessman and head of Egypt's Wafd Party, a liberal party that has nonetheless been co-opted by the regime. Eissa referred to Badawi as a member of Egypt's "soft opposition"—someone publicly pushing for reforms, but who isn't willing to challenge the regime in any serious way.

"They bought the newspaper for \$4 million, just to stop me from writing," Eissa said. "They had begun interfering within one week of taking over the paper, and the sale was only finalized 24 hours before I was fired."

Eissa said that the controversy over the ElBaradei article was simply the latest attempt by al-Dostour's board of directors, chaired by Badawi, to censor controversial and anti-government content from the newspaper. ElBaradei, in his article (since published on al-Dostour's website by its staff), argues that the spirit of self-criticism and rational planning, which allowed Egypt to come back from its defeat in the 1967 war with its victory in 1973, is absent from President Hosni Mubarak's regime. The board, Eissa said,

was staunchly opposed to publishing the article: “They said that it would lead to revolution in Egypt.”

Eissa’s dismissal appears to be part of a larger effort to mute Egypt’s most vocal anti-government figures before any leadership transition. Some analysts, including other editors at al-Dostour, have suggested that Eissa’s firing might be an attempt by the Wafd to ingratiate itself with the government and thereby secure a larger number of seats in the parliamentary elections.

All signs suggest that the Egyptian government does not intend to loosen its grip on Eissa or allow the democratic process to run its course. A few weeks ago, a television show offering political commentary hosted by Eissa was canceled. Mubarak’s regime has also shown little inclination to allow international monitors to observe the parliamentary elections.

Being silenced by government censors is nothing new for Eissa, who spent seven years as “persona non grata” in the Egyptian press after his first iteration of al-Dostour was shut down. However, he says that he will remain outspoken. “I will continue to be a part of the opposition and will continue to criticize the government,” he said.

Eissa will no doubt continue to be as vocal as Mubarak’s regime will allow him—but can al-Dostour, which he labored to transform into a legitimate news source over the past five years, maintain its reputation as a bastion of Egypt’s independent press? Eissa spoke throughout the interview in Arabic, with his wife helping to translate his remarks—but he answered this last question in English himself: “Absolutely not.”

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JANUARY 2011: MAKING FUN OF PHARAOH

BY ISSANDR EL AMRANI

What would happen if you spent 30 years making fun of the same man? What if for the last decade, you had been mocking his imminent death—and yet he continued to stay alive, making all your jokes about his immortality seem a bit too uncomfortably close to the truth?

Egyptians, notorious for their subversive political humor, are currently living through this scenario: Hosni Mubarak, their octogenarian president, is entering his fourth decade of rule, holding on to power and to life through sheer force of will. Egyptian jokers, who initially caricatured their uncharismatic leader as a greedy bumpkin, have spent the last 10 years nervously cracking wise about his tenacious grasp on the throne. Now, with the regime holding its breath as everyone waits for the ailing 82-year-old Mubarak to die, the economy suffering, and people feeling deeply pessimistic about the future, the humor is starting to feel a little old.

A friend of mine has a favorite one-liner he likes to tell: “What is the perfect day for Mubarak? A day when nothing happens.” Egypt’s status-quo-oriented president doesn’t like change, but his Groundhog Day fantasy weighs heavily on Egyptians. Mubarak has survived assassination attempts and complicated surgery. After he spent most of the spring of 2010 convalescing, everyone in Cairo from taxi drivers to politicians to foreign spies was convinced it was a matter of weeks. And yet he recovered, apparently with every intention of running for a sixth term in September. Egypt’s prolific jesters, with their long tradition of poking fun at the powerful, might be

running out of material.

Making fun of oppressive authorities has been an essential part of Egyptian life since the pharaohs. One 4,600-year-old barb recorded on papyrus joked that the only way you could convince the king to fish would be to wrap naked girls in fishing nets. Under Roman rule, Egyptian advocates were banned from practicing law because of their habit of making wisecracks, which the dour Romans thought would undermine the seriousness of the courts. Even Ibn Khaldun, the great 14th-century Arab philosopher from Tunis, noted that Egyptians were an unusually mirthful and irreverent people. Egyptian actor Kamal al-Shinnawi, himself a master of comedy, once said, “The joke is the devastating weapon which the Egyptians used against the invaders and occupiers. It was the valiant guerrilla that penetrated the palaces of the rulers and the bastions of the tyrants, disrupting their repose and filling their heart with panic.”

And there has been plenty of material over Egypt’s last half-century, marked as it has been by a succession of military leaders with little care for democracy or human rights. While Egyptians may be virtually powerless to change their rulers, they do have extensive freedom to mock, unlike in nearby Syria, where a wisecrack can land you in prison. In Egypt’s highly dense, hypersocial cities and villages, jokes are nearly universal icebreakers and conversation-starters, and the basic meta-joke, transcending rulers, ideology, and class barriers, almost always remains the same: Our leaders are idiots, our country’s a mess, but at least we’re in on the joke together.

Egypt’s rulers before Mubarak, Arab nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser and Nobel Peace Prize winner Anwar Sadat, were flamboyant characters, and the jokes told about them reflected their larger-than-life personas. The paranoid Nasser was said to have deployed his secret police to collect the jokes made up about him and his iron-fisted leadership, just as the KGB anxiously monitored the fabled kitchen-table anecdote about its gerontocratic leadership to really understand what was happening in the latter days of the Soviet Union. Sadat, though best known in the West for making peace with neighboring Israel, was the butt of joke after joke about his corrupt government and attractive wife, Jehan.

When Mubarak came to power after Sadat’s assassination, he was received with a mixture of relief and skepticism—relief because he appeared

to be a steadier hand than Sadat, who grew increasingly paranoid in the year before his death, and skepticism because Mubarak was the opposite of anything like the charismatic leadership that Sadat and Nasser embodied. Mubarak was also, at least early on, something of a joker himself. Not long into his reign, he quipped that he had never expected to be appointed vice president. “When I got the call from Sadat,” he told an interviewer, “I thought he was going to make me the head of EgyptAir.”

For decades many derided Mubarak as “*La Vache Qui Rit*”—after the French processed cheese that appeared in Egypt in the 1970s along with the opening up of Egypt’s markets—because of his rural background and his bonhomie. The image that dominated Mubarak jokes during that period was that of an Egyptian archetype, the greedy and buffoonish peasant. One joke I remember well from the 1980s played off Mubarak’s decision not to appoint a vice president after he ascended to the presidency: “When Nasser became president, he wanted a vice president stupider than himself to avoid a challenger, so he chose Sadat. When Sadat became president, he chose Mubarak for the same reason. But Mubarak has no vice president because there is no one in Egypt stupider than he is.”

THE JOKES TURNED BITTER in the 1990s as Mubarak consolidated his power, started winning elections with more than 90 percent of the vote, and purged rivals in the military. One oft-retold story had Mubarak dispatching his political advisors to Washington to help with Bill Clinton’s 1996 reelection campaign after the U.S. president admires Mubarak’s popularity. When the results come in, it is Mubarak who is elected president of the United States.

But Mubarak jokes really settled into their current groove in the early 2000s, when Mubarak entered his mid-70s and a nationwide deathwatch began. One joke imagines a deathbed scene, the ailing Mubarak lamenting, “What will the Egyptian people do without me?” His advisor tries to comfort him: “Mr. President, don’t worry about the Egyptians. They are a resilient people who could survive by eating stones!” Mubarak pauses to consider this and then tells the advisor to grant his son Alaa a monopoly on the trade in stones.

In another deathbed scene, Azrael, the archangel of death, comes down

to Mubarak and tells him he must say goodbye to the Egyptian people. “Why, where are they going?” he asks. Azrael is a common figure in such jokes, the most famous of which is a commentary on the increasingly brutal turn the Mubarak regime took in the 1990s:

God summons Azrael and tells him, “It’s time to get Hosni Mubarak.”

“Are you sure?” Azrael asks timidly.

God insists: “Yes, his time has come; go and bring me his soul.”

So Azrael descends from heaven and heads straight for the presidential palace. Once there, he tries to walk in, but he is captured by State Security. They throw him in a cell, beat him up, and torture him. After several months, he is finally set free.

Back in heaven, God sees him all bruised and broken and asks, “What happened?”

“State Security beat me and tortured me,” Azrael tells God. “They only just sent me back.”

God goes pale and in a frightened voice says, “Did you tell them I sent you?”

It’s not only God who is scared of Mubarak—so is the devil. Other jokes have Mubarak shocking the devil with his ideas for tormenting the Egyptian people, or dying and being refused entry to both heaven and hell because he’s viewed as an abomination by both God and Satan.

The Internet has opened new avenues for humor. One-line zingers that used to be circulated by text message are now exchanged on Twitter, while on Facebook fake identities and satirical fan pages have been established for the country’s leading politicians. Widely circulated video mash-ups depict Mubarak and his entourage as the characters of a mafia movie or unlikely action heroes, including one spoofing a Star Wars poster with Mubarak standing in for the evil Emperor Palpatine.

But the bulk of today’s jokes simply stress the tenacity with which Mubarak has held onto life and power. Hisham Kassem, a prominent publisher and liberal opposition figure, told me this recent joke:

Hosni Mubarak, Barack Obama, and Vladimir Putin are at a meeting together when suddenly God appears before them.

“I have come to tell you that the end of the world will be in two days,” God says. “Tell your people.”

So each leader goes back to his capital and prepares a television address.

In Washington, Obama says, "My fellow Americans, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I can confirm that God exists. The bad news is that he told me the world would end in two days."

In Moscow, Putin says, "People of Russia, I regret that I have to inform you of two pieces of bad news. First, God exists, which means everything our country has believed in for most of the last century was false. Second, the world is ending in two days."

In Cairo, Mubarak says, "O Egyptians, I come to you today with two pieces of excellent news! First, God and I have just held an important summit. Second, he told me I would be your president until the end of time."

Kassem quips that the Mubarak regime's main legacy may be an unparalleled abundance of derision about its leader. "Under Nasser, it was the elite whose property he had nationalized that told jokes about the president," he told me. "Under Sadat, it was the poor people left behind by economic liberalization who told the jokes. But under Mubarak, everyone is telling jokes."

Yet an increasing number of Egyptians no longer think their country's situation is all that funny, and they are turning the national talent for wit into a more aggressive weapon of political dissidence. The anti-Mubarak Kifaya movement has used humor most poignantly to protest the indignity of an entire country becoming a hand-me-down for the Mubarak family, as the leader presses on with plans to anoint his son Gamal as his heir. Other protesters complaining about the rising cost of living and stagnating salaries use cartoons to depict fat-cat politicians and tycoons pillaging the country. And since the beginning of 2010, Nobel laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency and a potential presidential challenger, has become a symbol of the kind of dignified leadership the Egyptian opposition has sought for decades. Notably, he recently scolded Mubarak for an inappropriate joke about a ferry crash that killed more than 1,000 Egyptians in 2006.

But even if Egypt's democrats fail to prevent the inheritance of the presidency, they will certainly keep making fun of Mubarak's son Gamal. One epic satire comes in the form of a popular blog called Ezba Abu Gamal ("The Village of Gamal's Father"). The blog is a collection of entries, usually from the perspective of Abu Gamal, mayor of a small village. He is constantly be-

ing nagged by his wife to promote his son, about whom he has misgivings; he doesn't understand all this talk about reform and laptops and so on. It is a biting portrait for those initiated into the details of Egyptian politics. Mubarak's "cunning peasant" persona re-emerges and Gamal is depicted as a wet-behind-the-ears incompetent manipulated by his friends, while countless ministers and security chiefs make appearances as craven village officials. Were it publishable in Egypt, it would make a hilarious book.

CHAPTER 2

Tunisia: An Unlikely Spark



TUNIS, JAN. 21, 2011 (PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES)

“In my numerous trips to Tunisia since the mid-1990s, I grew weary of Tunisian dissidents telling me that at any moment the people would rise up in revolt against their autocratic president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Keep dreaming, I thought.”

—Eric Goldstein, “A Middle-Class Revolution”

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab revolt began in a place nobody expected: Tunisia, a pleasant Mediterranean enclave long thought to be a model for the rest of the region, where the Islamists were kept out, unemployment was kept down, and test scores were kept up. Sure, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali was brutal, but, unlike his neighbors in Algeria and Libya, he built a functioning education system, a thriving middle class, and a relatively efficient public sector. Wasn't that better than the alternative?

It turns out that Tunisia suffered from the same ills as many of its brother Arab countries, not least the staggering corruption of its ruling family and its massive youth unemployment. As Eric Goldstein succinctly puts it in this chapter looking back on Tunisia's stunningly swift revolt, "A police state looks stable only until the day it is not."

Tunisia was indeed a model for the region, but only in the sense that its young revolutionaries inspired others across the Arab world to launch their own uprisings. It was Tunisian youth who first used the uncompromising phrase that can now be heard all the way in distant Yemen: "The people demand the removal of the regime." It was Tunisian youth who devised innovative tactics, such as spray-painting the windows of security vehicles, to overwhelm police forces. And the "Tunisia Effect"—a term coined by FP's own Marc Lynch—showed that waiting for dictators to bestow reforms from above was a fool's game; if Arab regimes refused to change, they would be changed from below.

Of course, Tunisia is also a cautionary tale. It was ultimately the military's refusal to fire on its own citizens, not three days of demonstrations in Tunis, that precipitated Ben Ali's harried flight to Saudi Arabia. Ben Ali's prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, remains in power, and the army's intentions remain opaque. Wave after wave of demonstrations and labor strikes has paralyzed the country. As Christopher Alexander warns, it's not hard to imagine Tunisia sliding back to autocracy as its citizens clamor for order. The final chapter of this story is yet to be written.

THE WAGES OF ARAB DECAY

BY MARC LYNCH

For the last few weeks, a massive wave of protests has been rocking Tunisia over the Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali regime's alleged corruption, authoritarianism, and economic failings. A grisly suicide attack on a Coptic Christian Church in Alexandria on New Year's Day has sparked escalating worries about the state of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. Over the last few days, Jordanian security forces have struggled to put down riots in the southern town of Maan, the latest in an increasingly worrisome trend toward local violence and clashes. Kuwaiti politics continue to be roiled by the fallout from the Dec. 8 attack by security forces against law professor Obaid al-Wasmi and a group of academics and parliamentarians. What do these have in common?

These four seemingly unrelated incidents over the last month all draw attention to the accelerating decay of the institutional foundations and fraying of the social fabric across many of the so-called "moderate," pro-Western Arab regimes. What seems to link these four ongoing episodes, despite the obvious differences, is a combination of authoritarian retrenchment, unfulfilled economic promises, rising sectarianism at the popular level, and deep frustration among an increasingly tech-savvy rising generation. The internal security forces in these states remain powerful, of course. But even if these upgraded authoritarians can keep hold of power, there's a palpable sense that these incidents represent the leading edge of rising economic, social, and political challenges that their degraded institutions are manifestly unable to handle.

Stalled politics and authoritarian retrenchment certainly plays a role in this institutional decay, as entrenched elites have proved skilled at manipu-

lating elections to maintain their hold on power and opposition movements have largely failed to figure out effective ways to organize and maintain serious challenges. Jordan and Egypt have both recently completed disappointing parliamentary elections, which drew boycotts from crucial political sectors in each case and attracted little enthusiasm from even those who took part. The impressive protest wave in Tunisia comes despite the near complete absence of democratic institutions and fierce government repression of public freedoms. Kuwait has evolved probably the most interestingly contentious democratic institutions in the Gulf—indeed, the efforts of its Parliament to hold the government accountable for the attack on its MPs bucks the regional trend by strengthening rather than weakening the role of the elected parliament and formal political institutions.

These four events hitting at roughly the same time, for all their differences, seem to crystallize a long-developing sense that these regimes have failed to meaningfully address this relentlessly building wave of troubles. For years, both Arab and Western analysts and many political activists have warned of the urgent need for reform as such problems built and spread. Most of the Arab governments have learned to talk a good game about the need for such reform, while ruthlessly stripping democratic forms of any actual ability to challenge their grip on power. Economic reforms, no matter how impressive on paper, have increased inequality, undermined social protections, enabled corruption, and failed to create anything near the needed numbers of jobs. Western governments have tried through a wide variety of means to help promote reform, but not really democracy since that would risk having their allied regimes voted out of power—the core hypocrisy at the heart of American democracy promotion efforts, of which every Arab is keenly aware. Obama talking more about democracy in public, which seems to be the main concern of many of his critics, isn't really going to help.

It would be good if these incidents served as a wake-up call to Arab regimes, but they probably won't. The tactical demands of holding on to power will likely continue to stand in the way of their engaging in the kinds of strategic reforms needed for long-term stability. Meanwhile, the energy and desperation across disenfranchised but wired youth populations will likely become increasingly potent. It's likely to manifest not in organized politics and elections, but in the kind of outburst of social protest we're seeing now

in Tunisia ... and, alarmingly, in the kinds of outburst of social violence that we can see in Jordan and Egypt. Whether that energy is channeled into productive political engagement or into anomic violence would seem to be one of the crucial variables shaping the coming period in Arab politics. Right now, the trends aren't in the right direction.

A MONTH MADE FOR DRAMA

BY CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER

January traditionally has been Tunisia's month for political drama—a general strike in January 1978, a Libyan-supported insurrection in January 1980, bread riots in January 1984. This year, however, January started out looking as though it would be hard-pressed to top the previous December. The last two weeks of 2010 witnessed the most dramatic wave of social unrest in Tunisia since the 1980s. What began with one young man's desperate protest against unemployment in Sidi Bouzid, in Tunisia's center-west, spread quickly to other regions and other issues. Within days of Mohamed Bouazizi's attempted suicide in front of the local government office, students, teachers, lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, trade unionists, and opposition politicians took to the streets in several cities, including Tunis, to condemn the government's economic policies, its repression of all critics, and a mafia-style corruption that enriches members of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's family.

In a country known for authoritarian stability, it was easy to see this unrest as a harbinger of dramatic change. In fact, the protests had been building for at least two years, fueled by frustration rooted in a deep history of unbalanced economic growth. Several organizations helped to convert this frustration into collective protest; the first wave in December quickly produced a cabinet reshuffle, a governor's sacking, and a renewed commitment to job creation in disadvantaged regions.

Ben Ali's rule had long relied on a skillful combination of co-optation and repression. By pledging his fidelity to democracy and human rights early in his tenure, he deftly hijacked the core of the liberal opposition's message. At the same time, he used electoral manipulation, intimidation, and

favors to co-opt leaders of ruling-party organs and civil society organizations. Those who remained beyond the reach of these tools felt the force of an internal security apparatus that grew dramatically in the 1990s. Most Tunisians grudgingly accepted Ben Ali's heavy-handedness through the 1990s. Authoritarian rule was the price they paid for stability that could attract tourists and investors. Ben Ali was an effective, if uncharismatic, technocrat who beat back the Islamists, generated growth, and saved the country from the unrest that plagued neighboring Algeria.

Over the last five years, however, the fabric of Ben Ali's authoritarianism has frayed. Once it became clear that the Islamists no longer posed a serious threat, many Tunisians became less willing to accept the government's heavy-handedness. The regime also lost some of its earlier deftness. Its methods became less creative and more transparently brutal. The government seemed less willing even to play at any dialogue with critics or opposition parties. Arbitrary arrests, control of the print media and Internet access, and physical attacks on journalists and human rights and opposition-party activists became more common. So, too, did stories of corruption—not the usual kickbacks and favoritism that one might expect, but truly mafia-grade criminality that lined the pockets of Ben Ali's wife and her family. The growth of Facebook, Twitter, and a Tunisian blogosphere—much of it based outside the country—made it increasingly easy for Tunisians to learn about the latest arrest, beating, or illicit business deal involving the president's family.

Shortly before the December protests began, WikiLeaks released internal U.S. State Department communications in which the American ambassador described Ben Ali as aging, out of touch, and surrounded by corruption. Given Ben Ali's reputation as a stalwart U.S. ally, it mattered greatly to many Tunisians—particularly to politically engaged Tunisians who are plugged into social media—that American officials are saying the same things about Ben Ali that they themselves say about him. These revelations contributed to an environment that was ripe for a wave of protest that gathered broad support.

Tunisia has built a reputation as the Maghreb's healthiest economy since Ben Ali seized power, as market-oriented reforms opened the country to private investment and integrated it more deeply into the regional economy.

Annual GDP growth has averaged 5 percent. But the government's policies have done little to address long-standing concerns about the distribution of growth across the country. Since the colonial period, Tunisia's economic activity has been concentrated in the north and along the eastern coastline. Virtually every economic development plan since independence in 1956 has committed the government to making investments that would create jobs and enhance living standards in the center, south, and west. Eroding regional disparities would build national solidarity and slow the pace of urban migration. The latter became a particular concern as social protest organized by trade unionists, students, and Islamists mounted in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Government investment transformed the countryside in terms of access to potable water, electrification, transportation infrastructure, health care, and education. But the government never succeeded in generating enough jobs in the interior for a rapidly growing population. In fact, two aspects of the government's development strategy actually made it harder to generate jobs. First, Tunisia's development strategy since the early 1970s has relied progressively on exports and private investment. For a small country with a limited resource base and close ties to Europe, this translated to an emphasis on tourism and low-skilled manufactured products (primarily clothes and agricultural products) for the European market. But scarce natural resources, climate constraints, and the need to minimize transport costs make it difficult to attract considerable numbers of tourists or export-oriented producers to the hinterland. Consequently, 80 percent of current national production remains concentrated in coastal areas. Only one-fifth of national production takes place in the southwest and center-west regions, home to 40 percent of the population.

Education issues complicate matters further. The Tunisian government has long received praise for its commitment to broad education. The prevailing culture holds up university education as the key to security and social advancement. However, universities do not produce young people with training that meets the needs of an economy that depends on low-skilled jobs in tourism and clothing manufacturing. This mismatch between education and expectations on the one hand, and the realities of the marketplace on the other, generates serious frustrations for young people who

invested in university educations but cannot find commensurate work. The challenge is particularly dire for young people in the interior. While estimates of national unemployment range from 13 to 16 percent, unemployment among university graduates in Sidi Bouzid ranges between 25 and 30 percent.

The trade unions' role is one of the most striking aspects of the protests. The government worked very hard, and with great success, to domesticate the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), Tunisia's sole trade union confederation, in the 1990s. More recently, however, activists in some unions have succeeded in taking a more independent and confrontational stance. In 2008 and again in early 2010, union activists organized prolonged protests in the southern Gafsa mining basin. The players and the grievances in those cases resemble what we saw in late December. Education unions, some of the most independent and aggressive within the UGTT, played a critical role in organizing unemployed workers, many with university degrees, who protested the government's failure to provide jobs, its corruption, and its refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue. Human rights organizations, journalists, lawyers, and opposition parties then joined in to criticize the government's restrictions on media coverage of the protests and the arrests and torture of demonstrators. In this way, a broad coalition of civil society organizations connected bread-and-butter employment grievances with fundamental human rights and rule-of-law concerns. They also pulled together constituencies that transcend class and regional distinctions—unemployed young people in Sidi Bouzid, Menzel Bouzaïene, and Regueb, and lawyers and journalists in Monastir, Sfax, and Tunis.

Tunisia's current political scene looks a bit like it did in 1975 and 1976, the beginning of the long slide for Ben Ali's predecessor, Habib Bourguiba. Again, we see an aging president who seems increasingly out of touch and whose ability to co-opt and repress has deteriorated. We still see a political system that lacks strong possible successors and a clear mechanism for selecting one. We have a set of economic and political grievances that enjoys the support of a range of civil society organizations, including some with the ability to mobilize considerable numbers of protesters. The fact that unemployed young people took to the streets is much less important than the fact that their cause was taken up—and supplemented—by civil

society organizations that spent most of Ben Ali's rule under his thumb or too cowed to act.

Tunisia might have turned an important corner. However, nothing in the country's history or its current state of affairs makes it easy to believe that the protests will lead quickly to a coherent, unified opposition movement with a clear message, a charismatic leader, and a national support base. Another long, slow slide toward chaos could simply set the stage for another Ben Ali—another unelected president who seizes power at the top and changes little below it.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF BEN ALI

BY CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER

As the end of his reign quickly approached, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali attempted to conjure the spirit that buoyed his government in the months after he seized power more than 20 years ago.

In a televised address to the country on Jan. 13, Ben Ali—speaking in colloquial Arabic and in unusually humble tones—pledged not to run for reelection when his current term ends in 2014 and to usher in a gentler phase of governance in the meantime. The offer was far too little, far too late, as the reaction in the streets of Tunis made immediately clear. But it wasn't just Ben Ali's tone that recalled an earlier era: In fact, Ben Ali's fall from power has had a remarkable similarity to his original rise.

In 1987, Tunisia teetered on the brink of a civil war between the tottering authoritarian government of President Habib Bourguiba and a popular Islamist movement. Ben Ali, who served as both interior minister and prime minister under Bourguiba, removed the president on the grounds that age and senility rendered him incompetent to govern.

In the months that followed, Ben Ali was widely hailed as the country's savior—the prescient leader who pulled the country back from the abyss. By thwarting chaos, Ben Ali had saved a struggling economy as well as the country's secular political order.

But Ben Ali was more than a savior. He was also, people believed at the time, a democrat. He said all the right things about the need for political competition, transparency, freedom of opinion and expression. He also spoke about individual liberties—freedom of conscience, the right to hold and express contrary opinions, and human rights. Ben Ali didn't just sound like a democrat. He sounded like a liberal democrat.

It was the prospect of legislative elections in 1989 that really ended the honeymoon. Ben Ali was not willing to allow an Islamist party onto the field. Nor was he willing to accept electoral reforms that gave the secular opposition parties any meaningful chance of winning. In fact, the electoral code became one of Ben Ali's handiest tools. On several occasions, and with much fanfare, Ben Ali announced "reforms" in the code. In reality, all of these measures were designed to limit opposition gains and prevent the parties from forming an effective alliance.

Some, perhaps even the president himself, might say that Ben Ali honestly intended to be the leader he appeared to be in his first year and a half and that he was forced to step back because of the need to make difficult economic reforms and fend off an Islamist movement at a time when the raging civil war in neighboring Algeria offered a grim reminder about the dangers of Islamist political influence.

But the results were undeniably ugly. Moroccans frequently refer to the 1960s through the 1980s as the "years of lead"—a time of intense repression against the political opposition. The 1990s became Tunisia's decade of lead. The Islamists believed they had done everything required to satisfy the law and become a legal party. Ben Ali's refusal to admit them into the political game ignited a fierce and bloody conflict with the government. When push came to shove, Ben Ali pushed back—hard. More than 10,000 Islamists and other opponents went to Ben Ali's prisons in the 1990s. As happens with many embattled regimes, Ben Ali's government developed a sense of paranoia. Any bit of criticism was considered aiding and abetting the Islamists. The government went after anyone who dared to complain.

Some of its tools of repression were bland and bureaucratic. Ben Ali never severed the umbilical cord linking the ruling party to the institutions of the state. His Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) was the state, and the state served Ben Ali. As a result, all manner of rules, regulations, and procedures became political weapons that officials wielded to enforce loyalty. A newspaper might not be able to get paper or might see its issues confiscated off the streets because of a story that stepped beyond the state's ambiguous red lines. A businessman might not get a license because he failed to demonstrate sufficient commitment to the president.

Other tools were blunter. The police force, uniformed and plainclothes,

became the regime's praetorian guard, operating directly under the control of the president and Interior Ministry. There is more than a little irony in the fact that the government recruited heavily for the security forces in the same disenfranchised regions that generated the wave of protest that broke in mid-December. The military, on the other hand, remained very professional but relatively weak—a fact that will no doubt affect Tunisia's future political development.

Once it became clear in the mid-1990s that the government had forced the Islamists out of the country or so far underground that they could not organize any meaningful opposition, Tunisians began to lose their patience with Ben Ali's authoritarianism. Human rights activists and dissident journalists began to complain more loudly, and the government cracked down even harder. Stories about beatings by plainclothes agents, arbitrary arrests, and torture mounted.

So why revolt now and not a decade ago? The media coverage has emphasized frustrations over unemployment and prices. However, it is easy to forget that for most of Ben Ali's rule, Tunisia's economy grew at a respectable rate. Tunisia has a larger middle class and a higher standard of living than any of its neighbors. As long as you stayed out of politics, Ben Ali's government left you alone and allowed you to make some money, buy a nice house or apartment, and live a better life than your parents lived.

More recently, however, the Europe-dependent Tunisian economy was experiencing global-recession-related contraction—which hit university degree-holders of the sort that took to the streets against Ben Ali particularly hard.

Then there is social media. When the definitive history of this era gets written, Facebook will get its own chapter. Activists used Facebook to organize on the one space that the regime couldn't control—cyberspace.

Not long ago, police firing on protesters or funeral marchers in out-of-the-way towns like Thala or Kasserine would have remained a bit of local lore, something to whisper about. Not now. Facebook brought the events in Thala to Tunis and helped build coalitions that the government could not break.

Tunisia now enters a truly novel stage. Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi has become the transitional president, with orders to organize new

legislative and presidential elections in six months. But that only delays the inevitable questions. Tunisia's opposition parties are small organizations with narrow support bases, no experience in government, and no experience working in a meaningful coalition. Moreover, they didn't play a particularly important role in organizing the protests that have presented them with this new opportunity. Can any of them, singly or together, convince Tunisians that they have the ability to cope with the country's pressing problems and build a democracy?

And what about the presidency? Ghannouchi has the virtue of experience, but his long service with Ben Ali will be a real handicap if he wants the job for a longer term. Other possible candidates have the virtue of principled opposition to Ben Ali, but they have been in exile or lack the bases of support in the country and its administration to easily assume such a critical post.

This transition is vital for Tunisia, and not just in the short and medium terms. Tunisia has never experienced a transition in power at the ballot box. It must develop the institutions to do so, and it must establish meaningful limitations on presidential authority. There are only so many times this country can revisit 1987.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE ISLAMISTS GONE?

BY MICHAEL KOPLOW

The reign of Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali is over. On Jan. 12, he declared his intention to immediately do away with restrictions on the press and step down once his term expires in 2014. When that concession only emboldened the protesters further, he responded on Jan. 14 by sacking his government and announcing that new elections would be held in six months. And days later, the military stepped in to remove Ben Ali from power and the president fled the country.

Given the historical ineffectiveness of Arab publics to effect real change in their governments and the Tunisian regime's reputation as perhaps the most repressive police state in the region, these January events are nothing short of remarkable. And while reports and analyses have focused on the extraordinary nature of the protests, it is equally important to consider what has been missing—namely, Islamists.

Unlike in Jordan, Algeria, and most other secular Arab autocracies, the main challenge to the Tunisian regime came not from Islamist opposition but from secular intellectuals, lawyers, and trade unionists. The absence of a strong Islamist presence is the result of an aggressive attempt by successive Tunisian regimes, dating back a half-century, to eliminate Islamists from public life. Ben Ali enthusiastically took up this policy in the early 1990s, putting hundreds of members of the al-Nahda party, Tunisia's main Islamist movement, on trial amid widespread allegations of torture and sentencing party leaders to life imprisonment or exile. Most influential Tunisian

Islamists now live abroad, while those who remain in Tunisia have been forced to form a coalition with unlikely secular and communist bedfellows.

The nature of the opposition and the willingness of the Tunisian government to back down are not coincidental. If it had been clear that Islamist opposition figures were playing a large role in the current unrest, the government would likely have doubled down on repressive measures. The Tunisian government is rooted in secular Arab nationalist ideology and has long taken its secularism and its nationalism more seriously than its neighbors. Habib Bourguiba, Ben Ali's predecessor and the father of the post-colonial Tunisian state, took over lands belonging to Islamic institutions, folded religious courts into the secular state judicial system, and enacted a secular personal status code upon coming to power.

Bourguiba, like Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, viewed Islamists as an existential threat to the very nature of the Tunisian state. He viewed the promotion of secularism as linked to the mission and nature of the state, and because Islamists differed with him on this fundamental political principle, they were not allowed into the political system at all. Bourguiba displayed no desire for compromise on this question, calling for large-scale executions of Islamists following bombings at tourist resorts. He was also often hostile toward Muslim religious traditions, repeatedly referring to the veil in the early years of Tunisian independence as an "odious rag."

Ben Ali, who served as prime minister under Bourguiba, has taken a similarly hard line. Unlike other Arab leaders such as Morocco's King Mohammed VI or Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, he has been unwilling to adopt any sort of religious title or utilize Islamic imagery to justify his rule. Most importantly, Ben Ali never attempted to co-opt Islamists by controlling their entry into the political system, but instead excluded them entirely from the political dialogue.

This history is vital to understanding why the protests were successful in removing Ben Ali's government. There is an appreciation within the corridors of power in Tunis that the Islamists are not at the top of the pile of the latest unrest. The protesters, though they represent a threat to the political elite's vested interests, have not directly challenged the reigning creed of state secularism.

Ben Ali's fate may have been sealed when military officers—who had

been marginalized by the regime as it lavished money on family members and corrupt business elites—demonstrated a willingness to stand down and protect protesters from the police and internal security services. However, a military coup would also represent no ideological challenge to the regime—the state’s mission of advancing secular nationalism will continue even after Ben Ali’s removal from power. And in the event that the military willingly cedes power and holds new elections in six months, the decimation of the Islamist movement over the last two decades means that any serious challenger is bound to come from a similar ideological background.

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DID WIKILEAKS TAKE DOWN TUNISIA'S GOVERNMENT?

BY TOM MALINOWSKI

Did the WikiLeaks State Department cables that described Tunisia's deposed leader Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali as the head of a corrupt police state play any role in encouraging the democratic uprising against him—and thus spark the wave of protests now spreading across the Arab world?

I asked our experts at Human Rights Watch to canvass their sources in the country, and the consensus was that while Tunisians didn't need American diplomats to tell them how bad their government was, the cables did have an impact. The candid appraisal of Ben Ali by U.S. diplomats showed Tunisians that the rottenness of the regime was obvious not just to them but to the whole world—and that it was a source of shame for Tunisia on an international stage. The cables also contradicted the prevailing view among Tunisians that Washington would back Ben Ali to the bloody end, giving them added impetus to take to the streets. They further delegitimized the Tunisian leader and boosted the morale of his opponents at a pivotal moment in the drama.

This point might not be worth dwelling on, except that it suggests something interesting about how the United States, and the State Department in particular, approaches the challenge of promoting human rights and democracy in countries like Tunisia. Consider the following proposition: None of the decent, principled, conscientious, but behind-the-scenes efforts the State Department made in recent years to persuade the Tunisian government to relax its authoritarian grip—mostly through diplomatic démarches

and meetings with top Tunisian officials—had any significant impact on the Ben Ali regime's behavior or increased the likelihood of democratic change. Nor did the many quiet U.S. programs of outreach to Tunisian society, cultural exchanges and the like, even if Tunisians appreciated them and they will bear fruit as the country democratizes.

Instead, the one thing that did seem to have some impact was a public statement exposing what the United States really thought about the Ben Ali regime: a statement that was vivid, honest, raw, undiplomatic, extremely well-timed—and completely inadvertent.

Had anyone at the State Department proposed deliberately making a statement along the lines of what appears in the cables, they would have been booted out of Foggy Bottom as quickly as you can say “we value our multifaceted relationship with the GOT.” Most State Department professionals have long believed that explicit public criticism of repressive governments does little more than make the critic feel good. They argue that real progress toward ending human rights abuses or corruption in countries with which the United States has important relationships, like Egypt or Pakistan or Indonesia, is more likely to come when such problems are raised behind closed doors.

Indeed, one of the most delightful ironies of the leaked Tunisia cables is that they make precisely this argument. One missive—after laying out more juicy details about how and why Ben Ali had “lost touch with the Tunisian people” (the very commentary that, when publicly revealed, actually seemed to affect the situation on the ground)—concluded that the U.S. should “dial back the public criticism” and replace it with “frequent high-level private candor.”

At least in Tunisia, the State Department did not disavow its condemnation of the Ben Ali government after its publication. Elsewhere, officials rushed to deny the obvious. In Sri Lanka, a leaked embassy cable “revealed” the supposedly stunning insight that the country's leaders can't be counted on to prosecute those who committed war crimes in their recently ended fight with the Tamil Tiger rebels, since the leaders were themselves responsible for those crimes. This only confirmed what everyone knew the U.S. government knew about Sri Lanka. Yet the U.S. Embassy in Colombo issued a public statement trying to take it back.

American diplomats have many reasons to avoid saying publicly what they think privately about their less savory partners. An obvious and logical one is that they want to preserve relationships that are necessary to advance other U.S. goals—securing Egypt’s support for the Middle East peace process, for example, or shoring up Ethiopia’s cooperation in fighting terrorism, or getting Kyrgyzstan’s assent to hosting a U.S. military base.

I’ve always argued to my friends at the State Department that this kind of thinking can be catastrophic in the long run. Consider, for example, how many of the national security threats that the United States has faced in the last decade stem from the misrule of two dictators with whom Washington worked in the 1980s—Saddam Hussein and, arguably to a larger extent, Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan. Somewhere in the State Department archives, there is probably a cable from Islamabad circa 1980, incisively analyzing Zia’s political repression, his Islamization of Pakistani society, and his creation of proxy militant groups, projecting the implications for U.S. interests, yet rationalizing public silence to maintain American influence.

In the short term, there are often tradeoffs between public criticism of repressive allies and working with them to advance other U.S. interests. Perhaps Pakistan in the 1980s, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, was such a case—though one could just as easily argue that the billions of dollars the U.S. provided Zia should have given Washington leverage to improve his domestic policies. In such cases, where U.S. interests truly do require “dialing back” public pressure, U.S. diplomats should at least acknowledge the pragmatic reasons for counseling quiet persuasion rather than pretending it is always the best way to influence dictators.

In reality, no amount of “high-level private candor” was going to convince Ben Ali that allowing free speech or free elections was in his interest, because it plainly wasn’t (even if it was very much in the interest of Tunisia as a whole)—and the same was true for President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and others like him. Authoritarian rulers do not ease repression or agree to checks on their powers because foreign officials convince them it is a good idea in a private meeting. Such rulers make political concessions when it is necessary to retain the support of key actors in their societies—from the general population to the security services to economic and political elites.

But depending on the circumstances, public, external pressure really can

influence the calculations of these domestic actors. It can help delegitimize rulers in the eyes of their people; it can cause elites to question whether tying themselves to their leader's policies serves their interests; it can encourage and amplify domestic voices calling for change. Precisely because it can be consequential, it is hard to bring such pressure to bear without causing diplomatic friction. The alternative, however, is to be inconsequential.

There is another reason why many American diplomats hesitate to challenge authoritarian governments in public: They believe that those governments will resist reform no matter what the United States says or does. I've had many conversations with State Department officials in which they have said something like: "Sure, our diplomatic engagement with Country X won't make it better on human rights. But neither will sanctions or public criticism or anything else." This cynicism is understandable. History may teach us that authoritarian regimes project a forced (and therefore false) stability—that over a 20- or 30-year time frame, most will experience dramatic political upheaval. But at any given moment, the prospects for real human rights progress in places like Uzbekistan, China, or Iran are very small.

If you were a State Department official and Hillary Clinton asked you every day: "What will the weather be like tomorrow?" and gave you points that you could cash in for career advancement every time you got the answer right, the safest strategy would be to answer that the weather tomorrow will be the same as the weather today. Likewise, on any given Sunday, the safest approach to engaging most of the world's dictatorships is to assume that they will be governed in exactly the same way on Monday, and base policy on that assumption. Why risk diplomatic relationships—and one's own reputation as a prognosticator—on strategies for promoting change that are not likely to work before you move on to your next diplomatic post?

It would have been rational, for example, for American diplomats to believe that the revolution in Tunisia was unlikely to spur similarly successful popular movements in other authoritarian Arab countries, such as Egypt and Algeria. But by the same token, it would have been rational for them to believe just a month ago that no such revolution was possible in Tunisia. Or to discount the likelihood that the people of Kyrgyzstan would overthrow their corrupt government just weeks before it happened last year. Or to dismiss as a pipe dream that the mighty Soviet Union would fall and that

the powerless Baltic nations would become independent, democratic states, just a year before it happened. If we bet on the stability of authoritarian states, we will be right most of the time, but wrong at the crucial time.

History is made when the weather suddenly changes—by deviations from the normal course of events. The challenge for American diplomacy is not to wait for shifts in favor of human rights and democracy before scrambling to appear to support them. It is not to wait until a dictator is halfway out the door before you condemn his abuses, freeze his assets, and demand free elections. It is to promote change in repressive states before it appears inevitable. If you think there is only a 10 percent chance that Egypt's post-Mubarak transition will usher in a government that answers to its people, or that in the next few years the Burmese military junta might compromise with the democratic opposition, or that a popular movement might successfully challenge political repression in Iran, then why not do what you can to help raise the odds to 20 or 30 percent? In foreign policy, as in baseball, .300 is a Hall of Fame average.

Political realities mean that American diplomats will use a different tone when confronting human rights abuses committed by a great power like China than a small one like Ivory Coast. They will rightly follow different strategies toward countries with strong democratic opposition movements, like Burma, than toward those where civil society is atomized, as it is in Turkmenistan. But where they are serious about promoting human rights and democracy, they can afford to be bolder, sooner, than they usually are. American diplomats need not always relegate their honest impressions to the confessional of a secret cable.

America's relationship with China did not crumble when Clinton challenged its government to stop censoring the Internet last year, or when she challenged the country to account for the dissidents it has disappeared over the years just days before last week's summit between Presidents Barack Obama and Hu Jintao. America's Arab friends did not walk away from their alliances with the United States after Clinton told them, at a recent public forum in Qatar, that "people have grown tired of [their] corrupt institutions and stagnant political order." Such public candor not only encourages dissidents in repressive societies, but stimulates debate among elites, who often privately admit that the Americans have a point. It can contribute to those

magical moments—unpredictable, infrequent, but in the longer scheme of things inevitable—when stagnant order gives way to vibrant change.

The people of Tunisia shouldn't have had to wait for WikiLeaks to learn that the U.S. saw their country just as they did. It's time that the gulf between what American diplomats know and what they say got smaller.

Tom Malinowski is Washington director of Human Rights Watch.

WHAT TUNISIA WILL MEAN FOR ARAB DEMOCRACY

BY STEVEN HEYDEMANN

Even as Tunisians struggle to create a new political order, the popular overthrow of Tunisia's dictator, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, is reshaping politics across the Middle East. Arab regimes have often been criticized as sclerotic and archaic; they are neither. Over the past two decades, they have confronted and overcome a wide range of challenges that have caused authoritarian governments to collapse in many other world regions. Arab regimes have demonstrated their resilience in the past, and they continue to do so in the wake of the Tunisian uprising. If the United States and its allies wish to exploit the Tunisian example to widen processes of democratic change in the Arab world, they will need to adapt as well.

Over the past two decades, Arab regimes have absorbed and survived the shock of the political transformations of 1989, the democratization of Eastern Europe, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Through trial and error, they have developed strategies for managing pressures for political reform and fending off the democracy-promoters of the West, in part by appropriating the rhetoric of democracy and turning it to their own advantage. They have learned how to control Islamist political participation, regulate new media technologies, and broker new divisions of labor between state and market in pursuit of economic development. In several cases, including Syria, they have safely navigated leadership successions that were seen as moments of vulnerability for regimes that built huge personality cults around their leaders.

Like their democracy-promoting adversaries, authoritarian regimes too

have built capacity, honed their best practices, and assessed lessons learned. In the process, they have insulated themselves from a Tunisia-like scenario. They remain repressive but are more permissive toward political oppositions than was Tunisia under Ben Ali. They have created space for moderate Islamist movements to participate in electoral politics, as long as they don't do too well. They regulate the media, both new and old, but offer more scope for political expression. Access to economic opportunity is politicized and personalized, corruption is widespread and corrosive, and inequality is high and growing. Yet in contrast to Tunisia, other Arab regimes have made it possible for larger segments of society to benefit from market-oriented economic reforms.

Now, the challenge to Arab regimes comes from within, a popular uprising that forced a long-ruling, brother autocrat out of power with shocking speed. Not only has every other regime in the region been shaken by Ben Ali's rout and his humiliating search for refuge—they have already begun to respond. Across the Arab world, regimes quickly took preliminary steps to mitigate the anger of marginalized youth and address unemployment rates that are among the world's highest. Algeria's government increased its purchases of wheat to prevent bread shortages that might incite protests. In Kuwait, the government is giving every citizen \$3,500 to counter the effects of rising food prices. In Syria, France's refusal to grant Ben Ali refuge, as well as the West's support for regime change, is being spun in a self-serving fashion as an object lesson for any Arab leader foolish enough to think of the West as a reliable protector. Whom could they have in mind? Saad Hariri perhaps?

There is little question that we will see further and more sustained reactions from Arab regimes in the months and years ahead. As in the past, these may lead to real changes in patterns of authoritarian governance and, perhaps, real improvements in the living standards of Arab citizens. What these early indicators clearly signal, however, is that Arab regimes are determined that Tunisia not become the trigger for a regionwide process of authoritarian collapse.

If Arab regimes are learning from and adapting to events in Tunisia, is the Obama administration doing the same? What lessons does Tunisia hold for U.S. efforts to promote democratic change in the Arab world? It is already becoming clear that the success of Ben Ali's regime in crushing

and fragmenting opposition forces has created enormous obstacles to the construction of a new political order. The immediate legacy of Ben Ali's regime—and a leading threat to its democratic prospects—is the incoherence and inexperience of his opponents and their flailing attempts to navigate between the Scylla of the old order's restoration and the Charybdis of a descent into chaos that might provoke direct military intervention. If Tunisia is an extreme instance of the weakness of opposition forces, it is hardly alone; other Arab regimes suffer from similar deficits.

For more than two decades, the United States has worked to overcome these gaps, investing heavily in civil society capacity building and political party development. Unfortunately, as the Tunisian experience has revealed all too clearly, these investments have not paid off. What might improve the opposition's odds in other Arab states? One necessary step is a shift in the focus of democracy promotion programs. However painful it might be, it is long past time to acknowledge that efforts to build the democratic capacity of Arab societies have largely failed. Building democratic capacity cannot, on its own, create the openings that are needed for opposition movements to operate, gain experience, and establish themselves as credible alternatives to current regimes. It is time to change course and adopt a strategy aimed at containing the arbitrary power of authoritarian regimes.

There are a number of ways that a containment-oriented strategy could be implemented, but one linchpin of such a strategy should be a concerted effort by the United States to secure the removal of emergency laws and security courts that give legal cover to the arbitrary exercise of political power by Arab autocrats. Egypt has lived under emergency laws since 1981, Algeria since 1992. They have been in effect in Syria since 1962. In Jordan, powerful state security courts were established in 1991 when martial law was abolished. Democracy promotion may not be sufficient to bring about the next Tunisia, but what it can do—by pushing harder to create space for oppositions to develop—is ensure that if and when the next Tunisia happens, there will be an experienced and credible opposition ready to step in and complete the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

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A MIDDLE-CLASS REVOLUTION

BY ERIC GOLDSTEIN

In my numerous trips to Tunisia for Human Rights Watch since the mid-1990s, I grew weary of Tunisian dissidents telling me that at any moment the people would rise up in revolt against their autocratic president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

Keep dreaming, I thought.

This country was not ripe for revolution. Anyone who traveled throughout the region could see that Tunisians enjoy a relatively high standard of living and quality of life. The country's per capita income is almost double that of Morocco and Egypt. It's higher than Algeria's, even though Algeria has oil and its smaller neighbor to the east has almost none. Tunisia scores high in poverty reduction, literacy, education, population control, and women's status. It built a middle-class society by hard work rather than by pumping oil from the ground; Tunisians export clothing, olive oil, and produce, and welcome hundreds of thousands of European tourists each year.

Although Ben Ali's Tunisia was a police state, his tacit bargain with the people—"shut up and consume"—seemed to hold, making the country appear to be a tranquil haven between strife-torn Algeria and Muammar al-Qaddafi's Libya. At least, it seemed to hold until a tragic protest by a street vendor caused long-simmering—though not immediately visible—grievances to spill over and unmask Tunisia's reputation for stability as illusory.

For the rare activist who rejected Ben Ali's bargain during his reign, this was not authoritarianism-lite: The president jailed thousands of political prisoners during his 23-year rule, the vast majority alleged Islamists serving multiyear sentences even though they were not accused of planning or perpetrating acts of violence. There was also the occasional leftist, journalist,

or human rights activist or lawyer jailed for defamation or disseminating “false information,” or on trumped-up criminal charges. Plainclothes police routinely tortured suspects under interrogation and broke up even the most anemic street protest, roughing up critics and openly tailing foreign journalists and human rights workers.

Still, those who experienced the repression were a minority of the 10 million Tunisians. The silent majority included most of the intelligentsia, who, since the early 1990s, had increasingly checked out of political life. Some supported the government because they feared the Islamists, who had grown strong before Ben Ali crushed them early in his rule. Others saw no point in joining a hamstrung opposition when the price was relentless harassment from cops in leather jackets and dark sunglasses, dismissal from government jobs, and restrictions on travel.

Ordinary Tunisians kept their heads down and attended to their work. And there seemed to be plenty of job opportunities: Compared with neighboring countries, there were fewer men lingering all day long in cafes, and fewer hittistes—Algerian slang for the omnipresent youths who spend their days on sidewalks “holding up the walls.” Tunisian women were highly visible in public spaces and well-represented in the professional class.

The government always had its critics, but by the mid-1990s Ben Ali’s crushing of dissent had reduced them to a hard-core handful of refuseniks. These lawyers, writers, and activists were hailed in Paris and Brussels for their courage—but were virtually unknown at home because repression had atomized their movements and the media refused to cover them.

It was these refuseniks who insisted that ordinary Tunisians were fed up and ready to revolt. The Tunisian economic miracle was an illusion, they claimed. Ordinary Tunisians seethed over regional inequity, their eroding standard of living, the shakedowns and mistreatment at the hands of police and local officials, and the stories of colossal corruption and wealth among the president’s in-laws and cronies.

Early in the 2000s, the small circle of political opponents widened modestly. A larger circle of Tunisians formed around the hard-core refuseniks; though not firebrands, they nonetheless wanted to be counted among those who said no to repression. These included intellectuals who realized that the president’s problem was not only with Islamists, but with anyone who criti-

cized his rule. A cautious journalism professor who had declined to meet me in 1999, explaining that such a meeting would bring police interrogation, began receiving me openly and attending the little gatherings organized by the beleaguered human rights community.

This outer circle also included families of political prisoners. In the mid-1990s, these families had hung up on me in fear, but five years later they decided they had nothing more to lose.

So, too, did some former political prisoners, who had concluded that remaining silent got them nowhere because the state's policy was not to rehabilitate but rather to crush them, through harassment, surveillance, and effective bans on employment and travel.

Long before street-cart vendor Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself on Dec. 17 in the town of Sidi Bouzid, setting off weeks of protests that led to Ben Ali's ouster, more than one former political prisoner had sat down in public holding a sign that (ironically) offered to sell his children because the government had kept him from working to support his family. One, Slaheddine Aloui, an agricultural engineer from Jendouba, left prison in 2004 after serving 14 years on political charges, only to face a 16-year term of administrative restrictions that crippled his chance to resume a normal life.

Joining this outer circle was the occasional member of the business elite who had discovered that it wasn't only dissidents who could fall victim to the regime's strong-arm tactics. Mohamed Bouebdelli, the founder of a group of respected private schools in Tunis, is a dapper entrepreneur who had no interest in politics—until presidential cronies demanded special treatment for their children, which he refused to give. Facing their reprisals, Bouebdelli publicly criticized the regime's strong-arm tactics—only to have a court seize, on spurious grounds, a private university he had built and operated. Bouebdelli, who had educated many of the country's elite and their children, was thus transformed overnight into an impassioned dissident.

But beyond this somewhat widening circle there still seemed to be a politically neutered majority of Tunisians who lived in relative comfort—and in keen awareness of the power of the secret police and of the ruling-party apparatus that dispensed or withheld services and favors. Tunisians had always told me that their country was ripe for democracy because its people are moderate, tolerant, educated, and middle class. This self-image explains

in part why Bouazizi's self-immolation after the police confiscated his vending cart proved such a galvanizing event.

Bouazizi was no ordinary street peddler—he was a university graduate forced to accept this menial job and the harassment it brought him from local officials. This was hard to swallow for Tunisians proud of the once exemplary educational system nurtured by their first president, Habib Bourguiba, whom Ben Ali ousted in 1987. And in a part of the world where public suicides are usually associated with zealots who blow up as many innocents as they can along with themselves, Bouazizi took only his own life, dramatizing his plight and that of others like him. His was an act of desperation that, true to Tunisians' moderate self-image, harmed no one else. This added to its potency as a catalyst for revolt.

If I did not foresee Tunisians rising up against Ben Ali, I knew he was finished the minute he appeared on television on Jan. 10 promising to create 300,000 jobs. Ben Ali ruled by fear, and when he thus implied that his government would respond to the Tunisian street, he was no longer Ben Ali. He was an emperor wearing no clothes. With that, the silent majority—or at least a healthy slice of it—poured into the streets to oust him.

Many factors helped fuel and sustain the protests, including Al Jazeera's saturation coverage and footage shot by ordinary Tunisians on cell-phone cameras and then posted on YouTube and Facebook and promoted on Twitter, even the WikiLeaks cables that signaled growing U.S. discomfort with Ben Ali as an ally.

But the bottom line remains, and should serve as a warning to other autocrats and the Western states that back them: A government that crushes dissent and censors the media might preside over relative prosperity and make the trains run on time, but its real stability remains in doubt as long as its citizens cannot express grievances through peaceful and open channels.

My Tunisian friends were right: A police state looks stable only until the day it is not.

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CHAPTER 3

18 Days That Shook the World: Reporting from the Streets of Cairo



CAIRO, FEB. 1, 2011 (PHOTO BY PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES)

“Pray for #Egypt. Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die #Jan25”

—Wael Ghonim, Twitter update, Jan. 27

“Hosni Mubarak ... is proud of all the long years he spent in the service of the nation.”

—Hosni Mubarak, Feb. 1

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INTRODUCTION

There's a joke that's been making the rounds in Egypt lately, and it goes something like this: Hosni Mubarak meets Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abdel Nasser, two fellow Egyptian presidents, in the afterlife. Mubarak asks Nasser how he ended up there. "Poison," Nasser says. Mubarak then turns to Sadat. "How did you end up here?" he asks. "An assassin's bullet," Sadat says. "What about you?" To which Mubarak replies: "Facebook."

While Mubarak may be the first world leader to be ousted by a call for protests on social-networking sites, his downfall—just 18 days from improbable beginning to ignominious end—was years in the making. It was the product of decades of pent-up rage and frustration at the corruption and abuse of power that had become the hallmarks of the Egyptian regime—a system whose bankruptcy was laid bare in its panicked reaction to the Jan. 25 demonstrations that launched the revolt: its unprecedented shutoff of the Internet, its hiring of thugs to attack peaceful protesters, its state propaganda against foreign journalists, and its failure to offer any meaningful alternative path to change.

Journalist Amil Khan, who covered dozens of protests and instances of state brutality that went ignored by the outside world, writes: "As time went on, it became harder to hide Egypt's social and economic stagnation as well as its decreasing weight on the world stage from its citizens. And the more the regime used force to suppress dissent, the more it alienated itself from its people." Mubarak provided the grievances, Tunisia gave the inspiration, Facebook set the date, and the Egyptian people did the rest.

JANUARY 25: TEAR GAS ON THE DAY OF RAGE

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

Egypt's "Day of Rage" dedicated to driving Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak from office has already moved the Arab world's most populous nation into uncharted waters, proving that nothing in the Middle East may be the same again after the waves of civil unrest that drove Tunisian dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali from power in one breathtaking month.

For starters, there was the sheer size of the turnout, which was larger than anything I've seen in 13 years of covering Egyptian protests. Jan. 25 was the first time I've ever been in a situation where the protesters potentially outnumbered riot police on the ground.

The Egyptian government's standard operating procedure is to overwhelm any public protest with a massively disproportionate wave of black-clad police. As a result, most protests tend to boil down to the same 500 noisy hard-core activists hopelessly penned in by thousands of riot cops. But today those numbers were reversed, and the police, at times, seemed completely confused and struggling to keep up. In one confrontation outside the Supreme Court building in downtown Cairo, the riot police attempted to lock arms in a human chain to block the protesters. Their effort, however, proved hopelessly ineffective—waves of marchers simply overwhelmed them.

When all else failed, the police turned to tear gas in an attempt to control the swelling crowds. At one point, I was caught up in an acrid cloud of gas as protesters fled, doused their heads with water, and tended to those who had

collapsed. In a surreal moment, I found myself on a sidewalk surrounded by both protesters and riot police—all of them gagging from the gas.

The makeup of the crowd—a true mishmash of young and old, male and female, Christian and Muslim—was also different from protests past. One woman in her mid-50s, who declined to give her name, said she had never before gotten involved in politics. But today she came out with her two teenage sons “to show them that it’s possible to demonstrate peacefully for change.”

I spent the day moving throughout downtown Cairo trying to keep track of a dizzying series of fast-moving events. It started with a lesson on how a new generation of activists—dismissed ahead of time by Interior Minister Habib al-Adly as “a bunch of incognizant, ineffective young people”—is using electronic means to stay one step ahead of the authorities.

Organizers announced long ago that the protesters would gather outside the Interior Ministry downtown, prompting police to lock down that area. But shortly after noon, it became clear that was a clever bit of misdirection, as a whole new set of gathering points was distributed via Facebook and Twitter.

Egyptians used the #jan25 Twitter hashtag to spread news and encouragement about the course of the protests. “If Mubarak goes down, there are going to be enough presidents in Saudi to make a soccer team!” read one representative tweet by @MinaAFahmy. Other tweets linked to Facebook groups that listed a series of new meeting spots and contact numbers.

As the day progressed, scattered groups of protesters moved through different parts of the city, growing in strength as they joined up with others. In a memorable moment, the 150-person-strong protest I was following met up with a much larger protest coming the opposite direction. The two sides embraced in the street amid raucous cheering and began marching together.

At one point, more than a thousand people stood outside a building along the Nile belonging to Mubarak’s ruling National Democratic Party, chanting “illegitimate” and “Oh Mubarak, your plane is waiting for you”—a reference to Ben Ali’s abrupt flight into exile less than two weeks ago.

Similar protests were reported in Alexandria and in the rural Nile Delta village of Mahalla—a hotbed of political and labor activism. Among the protesters’ demands are that Mubarak step down, presidential term limits

be implemented, and the country's notorious "emergency laws"—in place for Mubarak's entire three decades in power—be repealed.

By late afternoon, many of the protesters had converged on Tahrir Square, the traditional heart of the city. A massive deployment of black-clad riot police used water cannons, tear gas, and batons to repel the protesters, who pushed through police cordons and established dominance over the entire square, just one block away from the Egyptian Parliament.

As of early evening, the situation downtown was tense and uncertain. The police alternately advanced behind a hail of tear gas canisters, then gave ground once the crowd regrouped. Protesters were planning to sit in overnight, and were appealing to supporters to bring food, water, blankets, and cigarettes. The crowd still numbered several thousand, spread out across the massive public square that houses the Egyptian Museum.

One of the most impressive aspects of Tuesday's protest is its success at producing massive numbers without the direct organizational assistance of the Muslim Brotherhood. The venerable Islamist group is normally the only opposition force that can bring thousands into the streets. But the Brotherhood announced earlier this week that it would not directly participate as an organization, though it did allow individual members to take part.

"The people have to come out and take control of their own destiny," Ahmed Eid, who has been unemployed since graduating from law school three years ago, told me. "If we continue like this, we will change things, we just have to commit."

That level of commitment will be sorely tested in the coming days. Today's events mark a genuine watershed in Egypt's political history. However, there have been similar, albeit smaller, spikes of public frustration over the years. They were typically followed by a retrenching of the regime, a crack-down, and a return to the status quo.

What brought Ben Ali down wasn't a one-day mass protest, but a solid month of uncontrollable political activity throughout the country. Will Egypt's Day of Rage produce enough sustained pressure to produce the same result?

Ashraf Khalil is a Cairo-based journalist who has covered the Middle East since 1997.

FEBRUARY 1: A WOUNDED FATHER FIGURE

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

The chants of “down with the regime” started up again about 30 seconds after President Hosni Mubarak had wrapped up his speech on the night of Feb. 1, where he announced that he would leave the world stage and forgo running for a sixth term this fall. For the thousands of protesters spending the night in Tahrir Square—who watched the speech live projected on a huge makeshift screen—the message couldn’t have been clearer. Mubarak’s latest fallback concession would not be acceptable.

“It’s a political game; he’s buying time,” said Khaled Maghrabi, 46, an executive at a drug company who had taken to the streets on Friday. All through the square on a chilly night, protesters showed no signs of abandoning their historic campaign or turning down the pressure on the 82-year-old president. In the past week, Mubarak has dissolved the cabinet, appointed his first-ever vice president, and reached out urgently for dialogue with the opposition. But each new half-concession has only served to motivate and enrage the protesters further.

Mubarak’s speech, his second address to the nation since the waves of civil unrest started with the Jan. 25 “Day of Rage,” was a performance worth of extended study. He remained defiant, but came off as a little wounded, and basically admitted that he had lost the country. He presented his exit as a decision to “finish my work in the service of the nation” and head into well-earned retirement. He dwelled at length on the “chaos” and “looting” that took place after police forces melted away on Friday and promised prosecution for those involved. At one point, he spoke of himself in the third person: “Hosni Mubarak ... is proud of all the long years he spent in

the service of the nation.”

But despite the defiance on display in Tahrir, Mubarak’s latest proposal might just gain some traction with a certain segment of the population. Many apolitical Egyptians are showing signs of fatigue at the massive disruption of daily life. The Internet is still blocked, banks and the stock market are closed, the trains to Cairo aren’t running, most work has been suspended, and stores in some areas are running low on supplies.

Mubarak seems to be playing a long game—entrenching and stretching out the standoff, keeping the country disrupted while blaming the protesters for the disruption. In the coming days, he can count on his still formidable media machine to paint him as a beloved father figure whose efforts are unappreciated and who deserves, at least, to leave the stage with dignity.

A longer standoff will also give him time to rally support from other Arab governments. That support would likely be robust and sincere since nearly every Arab government—except maybe those in Lebanon and Iraq—should be very worried about what happened here this week. It took a solid month to place Tunisia’s Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in jeopardy. Mubarak, even if he survives this, has been placed into open crisis in less than a week. Jordan’s King Abdullah has already dissolved his government in a panicky attempt to assuage protesters angry about its economic policies and ordered immediate reform as a proactive step.

But there’s a deeply personal element to Mubarak’s latest appeal to his people, one that could very well resonate with ordinary Egyptians and rob the protesters of at least some of their popular support. A genuine war hero, Mubarak actually is viewed as a father figure by many Egyptians, who often forgive his faults and blame his underlings for endemic problems like corruption and police brutality. Even those who are happy to see him go might not see the need to have him humiliated.

It remains to be seen just how many Egyptians will accept Mubarak’s latest terms. Either way, the protesters remaining in Tahrir, who are calling for another massive turnout on Friday, have no intention of granting Mubarak an extended farewell tour.

“After the death of 300 martyrs this week, I can’t accept having him for one minute more,” Maghrabi told me, as he prepared to spend yet another night among the masses in Tahrir.

FEBRUARY 2: WITH EYES RED FROM RAGE

BY AMIL KHAN

As we ran from Cairo's Tahrir Square into the side streets, protesters smashed blocks of pavement and threw them at the black-clad security troopers in their ill-fitting helmets. I found myself next to a man in a turban and the long-flowing Egyptian gallabiya popular in the countryside. His eyes were literally red with rage. He had uprooted a metal barrier and was smashing it into the paving slabs. As huge sections of pavement came free he picked them up with two hands, lifted them over his head, and hurled them, screaming, in the direction of the police.

From among a small group of fellow protesters, a middle-aged woman in a headscarf approached him and tapped him on the shoulder. "Son, we didn't come to harm our own country," she said calmly.

The man, sweating and grunting, stared at the woman, then picked up his last slab and lifted it high above his head, ready to smash it down on her. Three other protesters jumped on him. As they held him down his screams and grunts turned into sobs. The protesters gave him water and left him weeping on the curb.

Cairo's Tahrir Square, where demonstrators have gathered to call for Hosni Mubarak's ouster, is a place that knows protests. I came across the angry villager in 2000, at one of the first protests I attended as a journalist working in Cairo. Students had organized a rally to decry Israeli treatment of Palestinians during the uprising that started that year. But Mubarak has ruled Egypt by emergency decree for three decades, and demonstrations are

technically banned. Before 2000, they were extremely rare. After the Israeli crackdown against the Palestinian uprising inflamed passions in Egypt, the authorities thought tightly controlled demonstrations could be a useful safety valve. Yet even though men like the angry villager turned up to protest against Israel, it wasn't the only source of their anger.

At that point in 2000, Mubarak was the undisputed leader of Egypt. His relationship with the United States cemented Egypt's position as a premier power in the Middle East. His impressive propaganda machine succeeded in making Egyptians feel any criticism of him was tantamount to flirting with treason. However, by Feb. 1, 2011, thousands were willing to come out into the street to call for his removal. From 2000 to 2011, Mubarak's callous and brutal rule generated great anger and frustration in Egypt. But during that time, foreign analysts, journalists, and government officials never thought it was enough to cause an uprising against him. Even many activists doubted they would ever actually succeed.

Despite the resentment, the consensus among observers was that Egyptians lacked the will to resist. Political parties were in disarray, with few members; the Muslim Brotherhood was happy to suffer repeated crackdowns without challenging the regime outright, and demonstrators rarely numbered above a few thousand. The regime's vast police apparatus succeeded in disrupting people's ability to organize and coordinate their actions. But, in reality, it hadn't broken their spirit. As a journalist, I met many people who resisted in any way they could. However, when the consensus among international media and policy circles was that Egyptians would never rise up, then there was little incentive for journalists to dwell on their anger or the reasons behind it.

Though I investigated and reported on many of the abuses of Mubarak's regime, I also never imagined his own people would rise against him. I believed that the president, and the elite circle of military officials and businessmen around him, was just too powerful. I also believed that the only actor able to pressure Mubarak was the United States, and as long as Washington bought into his "it's us or the extremists" argument, no one inside Egypt would be able to stand against him. However, having seen the despotism of his rule and the desperation of his people, I thought that once Mubarak died, the country would melt down.

For the best part of a decade, I saw firsthand how Mubarak misruled and brutalized his people. In the fertile Nile Delta, where plants can grow so green they seem fluorescent, I visited a village where a local wealthy landowner had pushed small farmers off their land with the help of hired thugs. The villagers had appealed to the police, but the local officer had been bought off. The police reacted in the way they had grown accustomed to, as part of a system in which there was no accountability for their actions—they assaulted the most vulnerable. Police troopers raided the village, burned crops, and stole belongings. When they realized that most of the men had fled in fear of mass arrest, they beat the children. The senior officer and the landowner had hoped the villagers would be bullied into submission. When the villagers organized themselves and chose a representative to seek help in Cairo from the judiciary and human rights groups, the troopers returned to the village to track him down. When they failed, they found his wife, ripped off her clothes, and paraded her naked through the village—a warning to others who defied the powers that be.

The wider world didn't avoid seeing Mubarak's incompetence and brutality simply because the excesses happened out of sight in the countryside. The outrages were ignored when they happened in central Cairo, too. On May 25, 2005, state security decided to escalate its use of hired thugs as a method of crowd control. Hundreds of young, largely secular left-wing activists gathered in central Cairo to protest for democratic reform. State-security forces penned in the protesters and then sent in the hired goons. In the scuffles, one of the thugs was captured by the activists. I heard him tell a group of activists and journalists that he had been in a police cell the night before for pick-pocketing, but was released on the condition that he help police "rough up" people they had told him were "traitors." Police officials, he said, promised him and the other prisoners a Coke and a Kentucky Fried Chicken meal deal as a reward.

The other thugs made straight for the female protesters and ripped off their clothes and groped them as uniformed police officers watched from the sidelines. The fact that a U.S. ally was using sexual violence as a political weapon against secular "natural allies" of democracy a couple of days after the U.S. president's wife visited the country and gave a speech on women's rights was little reported abroad. The fact that the regime received little crit-

icism for the tactic, probably convinced Mubarak that employing it was not only cheap but effective—which explains why his regime has resorted to it time and again.

As more Egyptians voiced their desire to see the end of Mubarak's rule through the Kifaya (Enough) movement, the authorities reacted by ramping up the brutality. Activist Mohamad al-Sharqawi was tortured and raped with a broom by security officers in 2006. He was just one of many. But most observers still thought the anger would not radiate beyond a small core of activists. When I was covering the Kifaya demonstrations, a senior colleague in London, herself an Arab, told me; "Amil, forget about the Egyptians. They have been broken by Mubarak." She sounded embittered by the disappointment of her own faith in the Egyptian people.

But as shocking as these incidents were, they generated little contemplation about the nature of the Egyptian state. Political discussion points centered more on who would succeed Mubarak—his son Gamal, or his spy chief Omar Suleiman. Extremism and terrorism were a secondary concern, largely because a militant campaign by violent extremists had been violently but effectively suppressed in the 1990s. If armed extremists couldn't topple Mubarak, the logic held, nobody could.

With no wider reason to care, most Western media outlets were uninterested in the gradual decline of the Egyptian state and the increasing resentment of its people. As a journalist for a wire service, I covered the rigged elections and the angry demonstrations. We made note of the first time protesters personally singled out Mubarak as part of the problem (2003, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq). But our stories hardly ever made it into major newspapers or onto television stations. When I later worked on documentaries in London, a senior foreign editor told me that Egypt was "one of the biggest non-stories there ever was." The feeling was that Mubarak was pro-Western, which meant that he was a "moderate"; Egypt was a story about ancient artifacts and beaches, not politics. Perhaps the biggest hindrance to generating coverage was that editors thought the issues afflicting Egypt—economic stagnation, state brutality, lost dignity—could not easily be conveyed to an audience with little interest in foreign affairs.

In the end, it wasn't about spirit; it was about pride. Mubarak knew his regime had to give Egyptians something to be proud of if it wanted to sur-

vive. In 2000, when mobile and Internet technology and satellite television were less widespread, it was much easier for Mubarak's regime to project a make-believe image because Egyptians were willing to believe their country was respected on the world stage. As time went on, it became harder to hide Egypt's social and economic stagnation as well as its decreasing weight on the world stage from its citizens. And the more the regime used force to suppress dissent, the more it alienated itself from its people.

Finally, it was the popular revolt in Tunisia that made Egyptians feel that Mubarak would have to go for their pride to be restored. If little Tunisia could manage to remove a dictator, so could they.

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LATER FEBRUARY 2: DAY OF THE THUGS

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

February 2 started out as a pretty good day for the anti-government protesters still massed in Tahrir Square. The festive mood and sense of community still reigned after another chilly night outdoors. When Internet service abruptly returned around noon, the good news spread throughout the crowd. It was taken as a sign that the government's grip was weakening and the tide was turning toward a resolution of the weeklong standoff with President Hosni Mubarak.

That turned out to be a gross miscalculation. By nightfall, the streets around Tahrir were littered with wounded protesters who were frightened, enraged, shell-shocked, and desperately short of medical supplies.

The first sign that things were about to tip badly into darkness came shortly after the Internet returned. I was in a taxi with a group of journalists heading to opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei's home on the outskirts of Cairo to attempt an interview. From the other direction came what looked like a 1,000-person march of pro-Mubarak supporters chanting slogans like "We love the president" and "He's not going." Many of the protesters were riding horses and camels—from the looks of them, many appeared to be tourist touts coming from the stables clustered around the Pyramids on the outskirts of Cairo. At the time, my colleagues and I thought it made for a great journalistic visual; we snapped a few pictures and furiously started scribbling in our notebooks. Within hours, those horses and camels had been used in a bizarre, medieval mounted charge against the unarmed civil-

ians occupying Tahrir.

The pro-Mubarak rallies that have turned the protests into a street war started late on Feb. 1, clustered around the Information Ministry, about a 10-minute walk from Tahrir. A group of roughly 500 were demonstrating there, in full view of the state and Western media outlets that have their offices on that block. It was a clever tactic, serving two main purposes: It allowed the state media to film the rally from upstairs and broadcast an endless loop of citizens declaring their love for the president; and it enabled the protesters to essentially hijack a number of prominent Western news broadcasts.

Around 5 a.m. on the morning of Feb. 2, I watched as the pro-Mubarak crowd noted the studio lights of a live shot in progress from a balcony, and then gathered below to loudly chant pro-Mubarak slogans. I observed for a moment and then walked away with a sort of bemused respect for the enduring craftiness of the supporters of Mubarak's regime. But by the time I made it back to Tahrir around 3 p.m. that same day, the scene couldn't have been more different from the euphoria of the preceding days. The protesters in the square were being besieged, and I saw dozens of bloodied young men staggering or being carried away from the front lines.

Crowds of rock-throwing, pro-Mubarak protesters were attempting to overrun the Tahrir crowds, who were fending them off with their own barrages of rocks and cement chunks. Tahrir is a huge public space with at least nine major entry points, and the pro-Mubarak crowds continued to probe the edges, seeking a soft way in. Protest leaders with megaphones organized the defenses, summoning teams of youths to block different intersections. I saw a middle-aged man walk past with blood streaming from the back of his head; a veiled woman held his arm and guided his steps, hysterically repeating, "We won't die. God is with us. We won't die."

As the fighting ebbed back and forth from about 2 p.m. until early evening, the anti-Mubarak protesters became increasingly paranoid and angry. They were convinced that their attackers were largely made up of plain-clothes officers from the police and State Security—basically the revenge-seeking remnants of the police state that had melted away last week after Mubarak called in the Army.

But the anti-Mubarak protesters were determined not to break ranks and

remain vigilant against the threat of infiltration by provocateurs. In previous days, the Army and volunteers had set up egress checkpoints, checking IDs and searching protesters for weapons, but on Feb. 2 it was much more aggressive. All people approaching the square were repeatedly frisked and forced to show their national ID card—which would show on the back whether the holder was employed by the Interior Ministry. As far as the protesters were concerned, anyone with an Interior Ministry connection was a thug. I watched as one man was apparently unmasked as an Interior Ministry employee; a group of young men nearly killed him before others dragged them off. The bloodied man was then turned over to the Army. One protest leader read off the names and ID card numbers of alleged undercover security officers the crowd had detained.

Much is still unclear, but Feb. 2's violence is likely to intensify questions about the stance of the Army, whose behavior was at the very least puzzling—and potentially very suspicious. Just before the clashes started, an Army spokesman released a statement appealing to the protesters to return home and allow normal daily life to resume.

The soldiers sitting on their tanks seemed to be passively observing the battle despite desperate pleas from the Tahrir protesters. One man seized the microphone and issued an angry call to the troops: "Make a decision now" and defend the peaceful protesters, he shouted. But other protesters were keen to maintain harmonious relations with the Army, long viewed as the protector of the people. As the man's criticisms of the military grew more strident, others wrested the microphone from his hand. One youth yelled at him, "We don't want to turn the people against the Army!"

The government's motivations at this point are truly mysterious. If it did indeed plan this as a sort of street-power move, why would it restore the Internet two hours beforehand, enabling besieged protesters to send a barrage of frantic and chilling tweets from the maelstrom?

As I left the square, a middle-age man saw my notebook and asked frantically, "Are people coming? Do you know? Are the youth coming to help us?"

FEBRUARY 3: SWORD VS. PEN

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

For journalists posted in revolutionary Cairo, Thursday, Feb. 3, presented itself at first as an opportunity to recover from and reflect on the violence of the previous day's protest. It did not stay that way for long.

Around 12:30 p.m., a few fellow journalists and I decided to chat with ordinary Egyptians in the middle-class neighborhood of Dokki. We approached a street-side cart serving fuul—the cooked fava beans that are the national dish—and asked a few innocuous questions about food supplies and daily life. Were the stores reopening? Were people returning to work?

The situation turned south almost immediately. A crowd of local hot-heads soon began assembling around us, demanding to see our identification and expressing suspicion of our intentions. I'm still not sure whether they thought we were spies or whether just being journalists was bad enough. One man asked aggressively whether we were "from that Jazeera channel that we're all so disgusted by." I responded perhaps a little too sarcastically, asking whether he saw any television cameras with us.

Suddenly one man started swinging at me, and the entire crowd suddenly became a mob. I was struck in the face at least four times. My colleague Lourdes Garcia-Navarro from NPR cleverly faked a fit of weeping hysteria, which seemed to get the guys to back off a bit.

After about a minute of scuffling, cooler heads in the crowd managed to pull me to relative safety and told me to get out and make for our waiting taxi down the block. I arrived at the taxi to find an entirely new standoff in progress. My colleagues—who included Garcia-Navarro and James Hider from the Times of London—were inside the taxi but penned in

by another angry mob. They were banging on the windows and trying to get inside. One man parked his motorcycle directly in front of the car to block any escape.

As the only Egyptian in the group, I became the focal point for their anger. My accented Arabic (I was raised in the United States) only heightened their suspicions. One man kept yelling in my face, “You’re not really Egyptian. Who exactly are you?” In response to their demands for identification, I managed to produce my Egyptian passport. My driver, Gamal, also pleaded with the crowd, telling them that he had known me for 10 years and knew most of my family.

But the Egyptian passport did more harm than good because it states clearly that I was born in America: For the paranoid and xenophobic mob, this was the smoking gun that proved my guilt. The crowd started shouting, demanding that we be turned over to the police or the Army. I responded, “Yes, please! Find me a soldier. I’ll turn myself over.”

As I was beginning to genuinely fear for our safety, an officer from the military police appeared on the scene and immediately helped bring some calm to the situation. Against the protests of the crowd, the officer managed to get me into the taxi and, to keep us safe, escorted us to a walled-in courtyard. There we found another group of terrified journalists—this time all native Egyptians working for a local English-language paper. They too had been rescued from an angry mob by the Army. Clearly, similar scenes were playing out all across Cairo.

I don’t think that the mob that harassed me was part of a coordinated campaign against journalists. Our attackers were just ordinary Egyptian citizens whose nerves had been frayed by 10 days of uncertainty and unrest. State television fueled their anxiety with a steady diet of conspiracy theories claiming that shadowy foreign influences were behind the waves of civil unrest and that foreign journalists were hopelessly biased toward the anti-Mubarak protesters—thus actively helping to bring the regime down.

Elsewhere in Cairo, however, it genuinely seemed like journalists had indeed been explicitly targeted, starting during the day on Wednesday and peaking in a cascade of incidents on Thursday. Those who weren’t attacked by mobs were arrested by police officers or detained—allegedly for their own safety—by the military.

The Washington Post's Cairo bureau chief Leila Fadel was "among two dozen journalists arrested this morning by the Egyptian Interior Ministry. We understand that they are safe but in custody," the Post announced. She was released late Thursday night. At least three reporters from Al Jazeera's English channel were apparently arrested by the Army while driving from the airport, according to the network's staffers. A Greek journalist was stabbed in the leg. The prominent local blogger who worked under the name "Sandmonkey" was arrested while trying to bring medical supplies to wounded protesters in Tahrir Square, the epicenter of the protests. He later tweeted: "I am ok. I got out. I was ambushed & beaten by the police, my phone confiscated, my car ripped apart & supplies taken." CNN's Anderson Cooper, along with a producer and cameraman, was attacked by crowds on Wednesday who punched them and attempted to break their camera. On Thursday, Cooper and crew were attacked again. Andrew Lee Butters, a reporter working with Time magazine, was detained and roughed up by civilians, who he said were taking orders from uniformed police officers on the scene.

The sheer scope and number of incidents in one day immediately discredited any government argument that these were isolated or spontaneous events. The U.S. State Department quickly dismissed that possibility. "I don't think these are random events," said spokesman P.J. Crowley. "It appears to be an effort to disrupt the ability of journalists to cover today's events."

There's really only one reason to attack journalists—if you don't want them to report their observations to the outside world. Although the protesters occupying Tahrir Square on Thursday had a relatively peaceful day, the sudden wave of attacks against journalists has fueled concerns that there's a tsunami coming—something the government and its supporters don't want the world to see.

But Mubarak and his supporters should also be concerned. The forces they're unleashing will not be so easy to contain again. The paranoia and xenophobia I witnessed on Thursday were unlike anything I've seen from the Egyptian people in 13 years of covering this country. For a country that depends heavily on a steady flow of foreign tourists, turning the Egyptian people against the outside world could have catastrophic long-term consequences.

FEBRUARY 4: FORTRESS TAHRIR

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

Up until Tuesday, Feb. 1, downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square was one of the happiest places in Egypt. Pro-democracy protesters, who have occupied the square since Jan. 28, were consistently positive, confident, and cooperative. Every day seemed to bring a new concession from a backpedaling government; the momentum, they felt, was clearly on their side.

A mass gathering planned for Friday, Feb. 4, was dubbed the "Day of Departure," and there were many in the crowd who genuinely thought this would be the day that President Hosni Mubarak would be hounded into early retirement. But then came a terrible and traumatic two days. On Feb. 2—a day on which many protesters admitted they had allowed themselves to relax a bit—the square was suddenly besieged.

Seemingly harmless pro-Mubarak gatherings, which at first looked like no more than a sideshow for the cameras, abruptly coalesced into mass of armed men who violently attempted to overrun the square and very nearly succeeded. On Thursday, Feb. 3, Mubarak supporters didn't attack quite so aggressively as the previous day, but they expanded their perimeter, establishing control of the two main bridges leading to Tahrir and openly barring people seeking to bring desperately needed food and medical supplies into the square. They also assaulted just about any journalist they could get their hands on.

By Thursday, Tahrir's "people power" vibe had a distinct aura of desperation and paranoia. It was a fitting three-day microcosm of the fast-moving Egyptian uprising that has been marked as much as anything by rapid, jarring shifts in tone. But even amid the genuine fear of being overrun by the pro-Mubarak thugs, there remained a defiant back-to-the-wall attitude. As

one female protester told Al Jazeera on Thursday morning, “We know that if we leave now, they’ll just hunt us down one by one.”

I entered the Tahrir Square on Friday morning, Feb. 4, to find that it had been transformed. Formidable metal barricades walled off every one of the many roads leading into the square. The protesters had apparently cannibalized two construction sites in the area. Men patrolling the edges wore hard hats. An arsenal of rocks and concrete chunks lay in a pile, waiting to be thrown. On Qasr el-Nil Street, a few doors down from After Eight, one of Cairo’s poshest and most popular nightspots, a medieval trebuchet had been assembled—which, given the mounted cavalry charge the protesters had endured on Wednesday, seemed entirely fitting.

The protesters had received reinforcements as well. Despite the previous day’s attempt to cut them off from the rest of the city, at least one entry point through downtown’s Talaat Harb Street had remained in the hands of the Tahrir protesters, enabling fresh cadres, food, and medical supplies to enter. In just a partial reconnaissance of the square, I saw three different makeshift medical clinics, each stocked with fresh supplies.

The security procedures around the perimeter, which were already fairly robust, were turned up several notches as well. The thug squads controlling the bridges had melted away, allowing thousands more to flock in. But the security had become so rigid that it caused a serious bottleneck outside the Arab League headquarters at the mouth of the Qasr el-Nil Bridge.

I have never been searched so often, so thoroughly, or so politely. On Friday, Tahrir Square was more secure than most international airports. The buoyant mood had also returned. Once a person made it through the multiple redundant layers of ID checks and pat-downs, they were greeted by a clapping and cheering welcome line.

Internal security was being taken seriously as well. As I was walking around, one man poked his head out of a building overlooking the square and yelled, “I need anybody from security. There’s somebody who just went upstairs and we don’t know who he is.” I watched as a young man picked up a length of iron rebar and entered the building to investigate. I didn’t wait around to see whom he found.

This physical transformation of the square reflects a similar change in the mood and attitude of many of the protesters. It is a much harder bunch

now. They have survived—just barely by many accounts—a harrowing experience and emerged battered but on their feet. There is a feeling that the regime had played one of its few remaining cards and failed. The people I spoke with were very aware that the previous two days of mayhem had backfired badly, causing a serious escalation in international criticism of Mubarak.

The protesters believed that if they could just hold Tahrir until Friday, they would get another huge turnout of supporters. And they were right: Friday's crowds at least matched and possibly exceeded the largest gatherings of this 11-day uprising.

But nobody there still thinks that ousting Mubarak is going to be easy, quick, or clean. "I think we were definitely a little optimistic earlier this week," longtime human rights activist Hossam Bahgat told me.

They know now that Mubarak and the security system he built over three decades are in this fight for the long haul. But today, at least, the protesters show every sign of being both willing and equipped to match his resolve in what could turn out to be a lengthy standoff.

FEBRUARY 4: TWO CUPS OF TEA

BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

I met two generals today.

Both were exceedingly polite, welcoming me to Egypt and stressing their concern for my safety. The first, the top Army general at a Defense Ministry office in Mohandiseen, a middle-class neighborhood in Giza, across the Nile River from Tahrir Square, offered me tea and cookies. He told me how he “liked America very much,” where he attended training as a special forces officer “many times.”

The second, a senior general at the sprawling military police headquarters way across town—not far from the parade ground where Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1981—spoke fondly of his training in England. As seemingly staged “man-on-street” interviews played on state television, he insisted we have a friendly chat.

“It’s one thing for people to demand their rights, OK,” the first general said. “But not like this.”

“The educated young people with Facebook and all that are one thing,” the second general chimed in. “But the Muslim Brotherhood is another subject.”

I asked them whether they thought the situation would end. “One or two days, maximum,” the first general averred. “They will get tired—sleeping in the dirt like that—and go home.”

And what about the police? He laughed. “They’re on vacation. Their day off.”

“The police are bad,” the second general offered. The unspoken implication: But we, in the Army, are professionals.

I wasn’t exactly their invited guest, however. Two hours earlier, I had been

heading home to my hotel after a long day of reporting, when I was stopped at one of the hundreds of informal checkpoints that have sprung up across the city as the police have disappeared. The teenagers who stopped me in Mohandiseen were apologetic as they ejected me from my taxi and turned me over to the Army; it was just “normal procedure, yanni.” I had foolishly stayed out past the 5 p.m. curfew, and orders were orders.

“What are you doing here?” one lower-level officer asked, after frisking me and confiscating my passport, driver’s license, and camera phone—but thankfully not my notes. “And where are you from?”

I told him I was a journalist who had arrived yesterday from Doha, Qatar, and wanted to see the situation with my own eyes.

“Min ad-Doha, eh?” Eyebrows rose at the mention of the home base of the Al Jazeera network, whose impassioned, daring reporting has put most other outlets here to shame. “Sit here.”

As I waited on a shabbily padded bench behind the front desk of the Defense Ministry office in Mohandiseen, where the guard wearily watched BBC Arabic, the officer took my belongings upstairs to his superiors.

I wasn’t sure what would happen, given all the reports of journalists being harassed, brutally beaten, or detained for hours on end. But nearly every officer I met was polite, if firm, in warning me not to stay out past curfew.

Upstairs in Mohandiseen, where I met the first general, a 37-year veteran of Egypt’s armed forces, there were more polite questions. What are you doing here? What’s your opinion of the situation? (I told him I just wished the best for Egypt, and that I had studied Arabic a few years back at the American University in Cairo—whose former campus faces Tahrir Square.) You came here from Doha? What are you doing there?

And then, with the tea finished: time to go. The general told me he would personally escort me back to my hotel, which I had been trying to reach before I was detained. He jumped in the back seat next to me, and we drove across an eerily quiet Cairo, bypassing the fouda—chaos—in Tahrir Square and heading suspiciously toward the airport. I thought I might be getting an early exit from the country, especially because I had been asked for my hotel and room number.

Instead, we arrived at the military police headquarters where I met the second general—more questions, more tea, another free ride back to my

hotel (“for your safety”).

They bid me farewell, and I piled into a silver four-door sedan with three MPs. We drove through deserted streets, passing through checkpoints set up by local *legnaat shaabiyya*—people’s committees (the MPs didn’t seem to have any better intelligence on the unfolding situation than I did). They briefly stopped at a downtown military police headquarters to consult with local officers about the safest path to my hotel on the corniche.

As we drove, the young captain sitting next to me grinned as he told me of his training in the United States. “I love Maryland,” he said. “I stayed at the Marriott and had seafood every night for two months. Oh, my God.”

And then, three hours after my friendly visit with the army began, I was back at the hotel, where tired European journalists sat drinking Stella, the not-so-stellar local beer, and trading stories about the day. Five or six had also been detained for being out after curfew. But I don’t think they enjoyed the experience quite as much as I did.

THE REPUBLIC OF TAHRIR

Earlier in the day, around 12:30 p.m., I made it into Tahrir Square just in time for Friday prayers, pushing through the main Qasr el-Nil checkpoint as hundreds of Muslim men knelt on the garbage-strewn street, guided by a megaphone-wielding imam.

Inside the square, a bulging crowd of thousands was milling around. Near a makeshift hospital on the way to the Egyptian Museum, I found Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a well-known computer programmer-cum-activist whose father had just been arrested the day before in a raid on the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, a hub of efforts to document human rights abuses against protesters and provide legal aid to those arrested.

“We don’t know why,” Fattah said, before assuring me that the raid didn’t matter in the grand scheme of things. “These activists do not lead this crowd. Tahrir is in control.”

Nearby, various Islamist leaders held court, including Montasser al-Za-

yyat, who famously represented Ayman al-Zawahiri before the latter became al Qaeda's No. 2 man.

Several hundred yards away, at the southern end of the square, a group of politicians congregated near the megaphone that serves as the most visible sign of the emerging attempts to channel the crowd's energy into a political program. Wael Nawara, the secretary-general of the liberal (and illegal) Ghad Party, told me that Egyptians "know how to take care of ourselves" after years of building a parallel state "in every field—education, health care, everything."

"We can get organization within hours of chaos," he said.

Behind him, a giant yellow banner outlined the protesters' demands: the resignation of the president, free and fair elections, a new constitution. What about Vice President Omar Suleiman, who claims to be offering dialogue?

"These people," Nawara said, "have stepped on the law and the Constitution. They have pissed on it in fact."

Suleiman's strategy seems to be to hold talks with the legal opposition—a motley collection of hapless political parties that have virtually no representation or respect among the protesters in Tahrir Square. "It's more like a monologue than a dialogue," Nawara said.

"It's irrelevant to the main event," said Hisham Kassem, the dapper former publisher of independent daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. "You have the regime trying to put out the message that they are open to dialogue.... It can't happen. Nobody can assume leadership, and there is nobody to negotiate with. There is only one way to defuse this: for Mubarak to leave."

"If they try to play tricks on us, we'll come back here," Nawara said. "If they want real dialogue, they know where to find us."

FEBRUARY 7: A NEW LEADER FOR EGYPT'S PROTESTERS

BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

Twelve days ago, Wael Ghonim posted a chilling message on his Twitter account. “Pray for #Egypt,” he wrote. “Very worried as it seems that government is planning a war crime tomorrow against people. We are all ready to die.”

And then he disappeared.

One day later, a huge, angry crowd—choking on tear gas and braving fire hoses, rubber bullets, and live ammunition—overwhelmed thousands of black-helmeted riot police and surged into Cairo’s central Tahrir Square, setting the stage for a standoff between protesters and President Hosni Mubarak that is entering its third week.

Ghonim, a Dubai-based Google executive who hadn’t been seen or heard from since Jan. 27, was freed on Monday, Feb. 7, after an international campaign for his release. “Freedom is a blessing that deserves fighting for it,” he tweeted shortly after 8 p.m., Cairo time.

Ghonim appeared Monday evening on Dream 2, a private channel owned by businessman Ahmed Bahgat, and gave a devastating, emotional interview that cut deeply into the image the Mubarak regime has been trying to paint of the protesters.

Looking deeply shaken, his eyes haunted and voice breaking, Ghonim insisted, “This was a revolution of the youth of all of Egypt. I’m not a hero.”

Gaining strength throughout the interview, Ghonim said he wasn’t tortured, but was kidnapped by four armed men, blindfolded, and questioned

relentlessly about how the protesters pulled off the uprising (they “had no idea,” he said). But later, when the host showed photographs of young Egyptians who have lost their lives over the last few weeks, Ghonim wept openly and then walked away, saying they died “because of those who cling to power.”

Many people here speculated that Ghonim was the administrator of the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page, set up to commemorate a 28-year-old youth who was brutally beaten to death on June 6, 2010, by police at an Internet cafe in Alexandria. It was the page’s call for nationwide demonstrations across Egypt—along with the spark provided by nearby Tunisia—that lit the flame of revolution, activists say. What was so effective about the Jan. 25 protest was that “it was a clear call to action,” said Nasser Weddady, civil rights outreach director for the American Islamic Congress in Boston. “Everybody wants to stop torture.”

In the interview, Ghonim admitted for the first time that he was indeed one of the voices behind the page—though he said repeatedly that it was others “on the ground” who made it all happen. “I have been away for 12 days.”

Ironically, by kidnapping, detaining, and then releasing Ghonim—instantly turning him into a nationwide celebrity—the regime may have just created an undisputed leader for a movement that in recent days has struggled to find its footing, seemingly outfoxed by a government skilled in the dark arts of quashing and marginalizing dissent. Within minutes of his interview, his personal Facebook page had surged in popularity, and the tweets were coming so fast that #Ghonim briefly became a trending topic on Twitter.

Ghonim’s reappearance comes at a critical time for the protesters. Now that the galvanizing moment has passed, it’s not clear where their movement goes from here. It’s one thing to build a coalition against police brutality, something Egyptians of all classes have suffered from for decades; it’s quite another to rally people around more complex demands, such as constitutional reform or media oversight. And after a week of nonstop propaganda on state television against the protesters—painted simultaneously as dangerous Islamists and Israeli agents—it’s not even clear that an overwhelming majority of Egyptians want Mubarak out immediately, as the

folks in Tahrir insist.

For the protest movement, decentralization is at once the source of its power and its potential Achilles' heel.

The organization that administers the square itself is a completely separate entity from the various other Facebook groups, political parties, and other movements that often get (or take) credit for the uprising. Ahmed Naguib, 33, a member of the 1,000-plus strong Tahrir organizing committee, told me that few of the volunteers who man the barricades, seek to root out regime infiltrators, staff the increasingly well-stocked field hospitals and pharmacies, and bring in supplies are "political" types—as is the case with the roughly 100-member steering committee that more or less makes key logistical decisions. Many if not most of these people didn't even know each other before last week—and they aren't necessarily activists. The ad hoc organizers have resisted efforts by some groups to secure representational seating in the inner circle of the steering committee, Naguib told me.

It's true that some of the youth groups are in communication with the "Wise Men"—the self-appointed council of elders that has offered itself up as a go-between with the regime—but others complain that they have little visibility on those discussions and distrust an initiative that smacks of selling out those who gave their lives taking and defending the square. But the youth groups don't necessarily represent the unaffiliated masses in the square, either. Nobody I've spoken with, moreover, recognized the handful of "January 25 youth" who met briefly with Vice President Omar Suleiman on Saturday, nor the "Coalition of Angry Youth" that gave a news conference on Sunday to offer its view of the negotiations.

Meanwhile, splits are emerging even within groups. Over the weekend, when the Army began moving its tanks further into the square in a bid to push the protesters south of the Egyptian Museum, dozens of young members of the Muslim Brotherhood rushed to lie in front of the tracks—over the objections of a senior Brotherhood official. At a news conference on Sunday, senior leaders of the Islamist movement stressed repeatedly that they had "no special agenda," a clear attempt to head off criticism of their decision to negotiate with the regime.

Inside Tahrir, different groups are gradually staking out separate geographic areas, with the Muslim Brotherhood dominating the megaphone at

the southern end of the square, the socialists assembling an entire speaker system a few dozen yards west, and various smaller groups sprinkled elsewhere.

“Everybody here is organizing,” said political analyst Hisham Kassem, “but there’s nobody to negotiate with. We have no control over the square, and they don’t either.”

FEBRUARY 8: THE REVOLUTION IS NOT OVER

BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

The revolution is not over.

Waving flags and chanting, “We’re not leaving; he’s the one who’s leaving,” huge crowds surged into Cairo’s Tahrir Square on Tuesday, Feb. 8, calling for the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak and demanding fundamental political change. It was clear that new faces, including a much larger proportion of women and children, had decided to venture into the square for the first time—perhaps inspired by the gripping television interview with Wael Ghonim, the Google executive and activist who was released from prison on Monday after being detained for 12 days.

“Egyptians are very emotional people,” said Dalia Ziada, a local civil rights activist. “After seeing Wael, now they believe it’s about young people loving their country.”

By early evening, a Facebook page set up to nominate Ghonim as the spokesman of the “Egyptian revolution” had garnered nearly 140,000 supporters. Meanwhile, a new “revolutionary committee” met to try to hash out a unified front and a set of consensus demands to rally around, according to two people briefed on the discussions.

Even several hundred professors from Cairo University marched into the square, chanting, “Down with Mubarak.” Earlier in the day, the university’s law faculty issued a statement announcing its “complete support for the January 25 revolution” and calling on Mubarak to “comply with the will of the nation” and name qualified experts to devise a new, more democratic constitution.

Meanwhile, Mubarak appointed a commission of legal scholars to rec-

commend changes to the existing constitution, though critics noted immediately that it was headed by one of his staunch supporters.

“The debate on the constitution is already mature,” said Hassan Nafaa, head of the political science department at Cairo University. “You don’t need any time. Everybody knows exactly what has to be done.”

A few kilometers away from Tahrir, at Pottery Café, a high-end coffee shop overlooking the Nile in the wealthy island neighborhood of Zamalek, Gucci-wearing young people smoked shisha and spoke with new interest of a protest movement that, for many of them, had thus far been something to fear, rather than welcome.

Zeina, 23, a graduate of the American University in Cairo who works at her family’s charity hospital in Aswan, in Upper Egypt, said she had been to the square once just to see it but still wasn’t sure which side to support. “I’m worried we’re going to be pressured to choose someone we don’t want.”

“Everyone here is in the middle,” Zeina said, gesturing at the young crowd sitting at the café. “They are all on the fence.”

Others disagreed. “I think Wael Ghonim spoke on behalf of everyone,” said her friend Sara, 23, who hadn’t been to any demonstrations but said she was “contributing to the revolution in other ways.”

Maher, 30, who owns a sporting goods store in the upper-class Mohandiseen neighborhood and wore tinted sunglasses and a white sweater, said he hadn’t gone to any protests yet; he had been protecting his home every night “with machine guns” and was afraid to leave. But after watching Ghonim on television—and now that the police are beginning to return to the streets—he and his friends plan to go to Tahrir Square later this week to show their support.

“Everyone” watched Ghonim’s interview and empathized with him, said Maher’s friend Ahmed, 29, laughing as he pointed to a well-coiffed Chihuahua sitting in a woman’s lap several tables away. “Even the girl over there with the little dog.”

At Tabasco, another coffee shop in Zamalek, Karim, a well-spoken 25-year-old activist, told me that he and several friends were planning to hold an open forum at a local cultural center on Saturday to help young people begin to get accustomed to their new freedoms. “But we don’t know really how to do this,” he said. “Do you know how to organize a town-hall meeting?”

FEBRUARY 9: EGYPT'S FOREIGNER BLAME GAME

BY PETER BOUCKAERT

A week into the demonstrations in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak's once unshakeable power structure was in full panic mode. What was once unimaginable had become reality: Egyptians seemed on the verge of overthrowing their government as hundreds of thousands marched through the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, and other Egyptian cities, shouting again and again their Tunisia-inspired mantra: "The people demand the downfall of the regime!"

As one protester told me and my colleague after viewing some of the dead at one of Alexandria's morgues, "We want to uproot this tree all the way down to its roots, and then plant a new tree"—terrifying words for the entrenched Egyptian autocracy.

Now, however, on day 16 of the protests, Mubarak and his cronies seemed to have turned a corner. Instead of running scared, the regime is fighting back with both words and violence to quash its opponents, portraying the opposition as a foreign-backed, un-Egyptian group of conspirators. Sadly, its propaganda campaign appears to be as crude as its actual physical crack-down has been.

After Mubarak's defiant late-night speech on Feb. 1, rejecting outright the protesters' demand that he step down, authorities unleashed a stunning wave of violence and intimidation. Gangs armed with sticks and knives attacked protesters. Thugs rode in on horseback and ran demonstrators down. State-run hospitals were under pressure to conceal the toll, so my colleagues and I tried to tally as best we could, visiting wards and morgues across the

capital. We've counted more than 300 deaths so far, much higher than the officially acknowledged death toll of 77.

But another target of Mubarak's wrath was, simply, the rest of the world. Thugs hunted down foreigners, including journalists and tourists. Reporters from the Washington Post and the New York Times were harassed and detained; al Jazeera's headquarters were stormed, its equipment confiscated, and at least eight of its journalists detained at various times. Attackers told their victims they were looking for an alliance of Israeli Mossad spies, American agents, Iranian and Afghan intelligence, Hamas provocateurs, and other sinister elements that were conspiring to "destroy Egypt."

Why this intense anti-foreigner violence? In short, because the regime was trying just about everything to preserve the privileges of its corrupt rule. There is considerable circumstantial evidence to suggest that Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party, his Information Ministry, and elements of his security services sponsored a coordinated campaign to discredit and break up the largely peaceful pro-democracy protests that began on Jan. 25 and to intimidate and silence the journalists, foreign and Egyptian, who were reporting on it.

Senior officials, including Mubarak himself, darkly hinted of supposed foreign involvement in the protests. On Feb. 1, Mubarak said that honest protesters had been "exploited" by spoilers with political interests. In a nationwide address two days later, his newly appointed vice president, Omar Suleiman, more explicitly accused "foreign influences" of spawning chaos.

The innuendo didn't stop there. From the beginning of the protests, "reports" of foreign conspiracies dominated state television news. Egyptian channels such as Al Oula TV, Nile TV, and Al Masriya TV, all controlled by the Information Ministry, began playing virulent propaganda about the alleged plots and conspiracies hatched abroad. Similar rhetoric also ran on the pro-regime Mehwar TV owned by a close associate of Mubarak's party and in the pages of state-controlled newspapers such as Al-Ahram and Al-Akhbar.

Many of the claims of foreign intervention came on so-called call-in shows. On Feb. 1, for example, Mehwar TV broadcast a phone interview with a young woman who claimed she had been at the protests since the first day and had seen a group of "foreign-looking men"—Turks working

for Iranian intelligence, she said—with lots of cash and satellite phones, distributing expensive gifts and food to protesters. She said they were also distributing political fliers, which is illegal in Egypt. But such calls may well have been staged. The call-in numbers displayed were not even functional, as democracy protesters found out when they tried to dial them.

The next day, Mehwar TV broadcast a breathless interview with a woman whose face they pixelated and who claimed that she had been recruited by Mossad and trained by the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House on how to topple the Egyptian government, and that she had been working closely with Qatar, home of Al Jazeera TV. She said that each of the protest leaders had received \$50,000 in cash to round up protesters and instigate the burning of the headquarters of Mubarak's National Democratic Party. The station offered no independent corroboration of this fanciful story, which among other oddities, implausibly links the Mossad with Al Jazeera—when the TV network is in fact highly critical of Israel. (It's also quite unclear why the Mossad would want to unseat Mubarak, given that his regime is one of only two Arab governments to have a peace treaty with Israel.)

The absurdities continued. Someone who claimed he was a protester called into state-controlled Al Oula (Channel One) TV on the night of Feb. 2, saying he had just returned from Tahrir Square. He reported that 75 percent of the people there were foreigners, including a group of "Iranians or Afghans" who yelled at him in a language he didn't understand. On Feb. 5, the Mehwar TV show 48 Hours interviewed a young man who claimed he was one of the main protest organizers. He alleged that "Islamists with long beards" had taken over control of Tahrir Square and had smuggled in 23,000 guns into the area, many stolen from police stations. The presenter then took a call from Abd al-Aziz Darwish, an editor at Al-Ahram, the main state-owned newspaper, saying he could confirm that the weapons had been taken into Tahrir Square and that he had "top secret security information" that the Muslim Brotherhood was responsible for smuggling them in.

The Information Ministry even took its propaganda war to the phone networks, forcing mobile-phone carriers including Vodafone, Mobinil, and Etisalat to send out text messages to all subscribers urging them to attend pro-Mubarak rallies. One Vodafone message on Feb. 1 read: "The Armed Forces urge Egypt's loyal men to confront the traitors and the criminals and

to protect our families, our honor and our precious Egypt.” Some messages even mentioned locations for the rallies.

In a country where so many—particularly the poor who don’t have access to satellite television—rely on the ubiquitous state-controlled media for their information and cell phones for communication, the approach was comprehensive and effective. Rather than being depicted as an expression of popular disgust with the government, the protests were portrayed as a complex international conspiracy. And indeed, such distorted coverage whipped up enough anti-foreigner hysteria that a number of expatriates, including journalists, were viciously attacked on the streets.

Many in the police and Army were apparently convinced by the propaganda. One activist who was brutally beaten while being detained by the military told me how an Army interrogator, who tortured him with electric shocks, was absolutely obsessed with saving the country from the foreign spies trying to ruin it. In an ironic twist, it was another detainee, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood—another central part of the “conspiracy”—who finally convinced the interrogator that his paranoia was unsustainable. “He told the interrogator that we weren’t a foreign-inspired movement, explaining it was ridiculous to believe that the Pakistanis, Iran, and the United States were doing this, as they don’t work together in any way,” the released detainee told me. The Brotherhood member, he said, told the interrogator that “we were all Egyptians in the movement.”

Other state employees, including several prominent members of the media, however, were unconvinced. On Jan. 26, popular TV host Mahmoud Saad resigned from his nightly talk show, *Masr ElNahrda*, after state television refused to broadcast his candid look at the protests. On Feb. 3, a leading presenter and deputy head of the state-controlled English-language Nile TV, Shahira Amin, also resigned, saying she refused to continue being part of the lies and propaganda. Indeed, many of those who attended pro-Mubarak rallies appeared to be state-company employees. From our hotel balcony, we watched government-run buses go back and forth from Tahrir Square, bringing in the thousands of government supporters.

But the xenophobic, state-sponsored attacks collapsed just as quickly as they had begun. By last Friday, Feb. 4, the pro-democracy demonstrators had taken back the momentum of the street, overcoming the fear and stag-

ing one of their biggest rallies yet. Foreign journalists once again walked the streets of Cairo without fear. If anything, the government's attempts to crush the protests—with violence and propaganda—had the opposite effect, hardening the opposition's resolve.

And yet the fight for a new, more democratic Egypt, free from state propaganda and intimidation, is far from over. America's new Man in Cairo, Suleiman, carries too much of the baggage of the past. When Christiane Amanpour asked him last Thursday whether the aspirations of the youth for a more democratic society might not represent a real yearning, he responded, "I don't think that's only from the young people; others are pushing them to do that." He warned darkly of "the Islamic current" that was inspiring the youthful protesters. Perhaps he's been watching too much state television.

Peter Bouckaert is emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. Soraya Morayef assisted with the research for this article.

FEBRUARY 10: 'WE NEED TO DRAG HIM FROM HIS PALACE'

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

Around 9 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 10, the tens of thousands of people packing Cairo's Tahrir Square were beyond euphoric as they reveled in a sense of hard-fought communal victory. In one section of the vast public space, a group of flag-draped young men danced around in a sort of conga line, chanting, "Hosni's leaving tonight! Hosni's leaving tonight!"

Elsewhere, a second circle danced to a live drum as a young man sitting on someone's shoulders led them in chants of: "We're the Internet youth/ We're the youth of freedom."

A flurry of early evening developments had stoked anticipation that this would be the night that President Hosni Mubarak would finally surrender to the demands of the protesters who had occupied Tahrir since Jan. 28 and announce his immediate resignation. State television had announced that Mubarak would address the country at 10 p.m., and several respectable news outlets were reporting that he would resign. Thousands more people continued to stream into the square, determined to be in Tahrir to witness the historic moment.

I spoke with a young veiled woman named May Gaber, a journalist who writes for Ikhwanonline, the official website of the Muslim Brotherhood. Gaber was sporting a large bandage on her face, thanks to a car accident on Thursday morning. When she heard the news reports, she left the hospital and came to Tahrir along with her mother and sister.

"I feel like we are halfway down the path. Of course it makes me very

happy,” she told me. “I used to be almost embarrassed to be Egyptian; now at last I am truly proud.”

Mubarak’s departure seemed to be such a done deal that many protesters had already moved on to a discussion of what a post-Mubarak Egypt should look like. Several people told me they automatically rejected the idea of Vice President Omar Suleiman assuming power. “We don’t want Suleiman either. We want to choose our own president. That’s the whole point,” said Mohammed Abdel Salam, a 32-year-old small-business owner.

Perhaps the most prescient person in the crowd was Mahmoud Salem, a 29-year old IT professional who blogs under the name Sandmonkey. “I’ll believe it when I see the tape. I want to see him say it,” Salem said.

I watched the speech from the northeast corner of the square across from the Egyptian Museum. A sheet had been hung from lampposts to serve as a projection screen for the live broadcast of Al Jazeera. The sound quality was terrible, so few of us could actually make out what Mubarak was saying.

But as the president’s speech went on and he failed to say the magic sentence everyone here was waiting for, you could feel a sense of stunned realization settle over the crowds. Even the dozen or so soldiers clustered on top of a tank watching the speech looked grim.

About halfway through Mubarak’s speech, one guy behind me yelled out: “Does that look like someone who’s leaving? He won’t go until he’s removed. So we’ll remove him!”

The mood in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak’s speech was difficult to define—equal parts deflation, determination, and a mounting sense of rage. “I feel hatred. I feel like we need to drag him from his palace,” said Mayada Moursi, a schoolteacher in her early 30s. Another man, 25-year old Mahmoud Ahmed, simply shrugged and said: “I feel like our president is stupid.”

The Tahrir protesters clearly feel that despite more than two weeks of widening public unrest, they still haven’t actually managed to deliver their message to Mubarak in a manner he understands. So now the question becomes: What will they do next to ensure he gets it and goes into early retirement?

Within an hour of the conclusion of Mubarak’s speech, there were reports of protesters staking out new ground and making moves that could poten-

tially bring them into conflict with the Army. One group of protesters was moving to surround the Information Ministry, located near Tahrir. Another group seemed determined to make the several-mile trek to the presidential palace in the outlying district of Heliopolis. Both locations are heavily fortified, and it's unlikely the Army will let either be taken. But can the soldiers do so while also keeping their repeated promises not to harm the protesters?

Even before Thursday night's bizarre non-resignation, Friday was shaping up to be an angry day; mass symbolic funerals were planned for the estimated 300 protesters killed since the civil unrest campaign began on Jan. 25.

Thursday's events seem certain to add an extra level of intensity and frustration. There is now a real possibility for violence. Former International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei put out an ominous message on Twitter: "Egypt will explode. Army must save the country now."

But within a half-hour of Mubarak's speech, some protest organizers were already working to tamp down the rampant emotions of the enraged crowds. One man pleaded through a megaphone: "Please people, I'm begging you. Tomorrow's protest must be peaceful, no matter how much they provoke us."

FEBRUARY 11: PHARAOH IS DEAD, LONG LIVE PHARAOH?

BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

Pharaoh is gone.

In just 18 days, a ragtag youth army overthrew one of the Arab world's most entrenched and brutal dictatorships, overcoming their own fears, the regime's considerable tools of oppression, and the doubts of outside powers that still aren't sure whether their interests will be served by a messy transition to democracy.

I arrived in Cairo Thursday, Feb. 3, to cover what was then an unknown quantity. Was it a revolution? A revolt? Another failed uprising? This much was known: It was a gripping story, an unprecedented outpouring of popular anger whose aim was to drive President Hosni Mubarak from power and replace him with an electoral democracy.

On Wednesday, Feb. 2, the night before my flight, I had stayed awake glued to my Twitter feed and Al Jazeera, watching in disbelief as men armed with whips, knives, chains, and Molotov cocktails besieged Tahrir Square in a thuggish bid to flush the protesters out of downtown Cairo and crush their uprising. Up to the last minute, I still wasn't sure whether it would be safe to go; the U.S. State Department issued a sharply worded statement urging all Americans to leave the country "immediately" as the violence—clearly orchestrated by elements of the regime itself—began taking on an ugly, anti-foreigner tone.

The previous week, the protesters had twice outwitted and outfought Mubarak's black-clad riot police, finally seizing Tahrir Square and sending

the regime's security forces melting into the night, while the Army mobilized to secure key government buildings.

They were still hanging on when I reached downtown Cairo late Thursday afternoon, after cruising along nearly deserted streets, past tanks, armored personnel carriers, and tense soldiers holding bayoneted assault rifles. I had landed in a war zone. The windows on the ground floor of my hotel, located right near the main entrance to the square, were barricaded, the lobby's lights dimmed, perhaps in the hope that Mubarak's goons would ignore us if they couldn't see us. Security guards nervously searched my bags and hastily ushered me inside.

Ironically, the safest place in Cairo was Tahrir Square itself. Although a rock battle was still raging on the northern end of the square near the landmark Egyptian Museum, it had settled into a stalemate. The "pro-Mubarak protesters"—as some gullible Western news outlets still referred to them—knew by then that they were badly outnumbered, and in any case their tactics had backfired badly; governments around the world expressed shock and demanded that Mubarak allow the demonstrators to express their grievances in peace.

Meanwhile, attacks on journalists continued, made all the more dangerous by a vicious campaign whipped up by Egyptian state television against foreigners. The following morning, I called a friend with long experience in Cairo. Military police had just raided the offices of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, a legal-aid clinic that had become the locus of efforts to document instances of abuse and illegal detainment. My friend told me his organization might be next; he was leaving town and lying low for a while. Management at the big hotels around the square had been told in no uncertain terms to control their journalists or have them controlled for them, other friends warned me.

But we journalists were never the story; the protesters' desperate struggle to hang onto the square was. My impression upon arrival was that the regime, having tried violence, was now deftly maneuvering to marginalize the protesters after failing to crush them. Outside the square, Egyptians began clamoring for their lives to return to normal. As for the protesters, state TV darkly warned that they were traitors serving a foreign agenda, part of an Israeli-Iranian axis bent on destroying Egypt.

That was, of course, complete nonsense—but it still seemed like it was working.

On Friday, Feb. 4—optimistically billed as the “Day of Departure”—I met dozens of young Egyptians who often boiled their demands down to one simple word: “freedom.” Tarek al-Alfy, a 30-year-old tech entrepreneur from Giza, told me that he had come to the protests for the first time that day to express his outrage at the government’s unprecedented shutdown of the Internet. “I felt like I was living in North Korea, so I decided to go to Tahrir,” he said. “I want a fair constitution.”

Near the museum, where a half-dozen burned-out police vehicles were scattered at the scene of Feb. 2’s battles, I met Mohamed Abdel el-Ainein, a 49-year-old mechanic Army veteran who was resting in the driver’s seat of a truck, his head bandaged from a nasty direct hit. He was too tired to speak. A doctor at the makeshift clinic nearby, Ahmed Abdel Rahim, told me he had watched five people die overnight and said he had treated “dozens” of trauma victims since 6 a.m. that day. As I spoke with him, a young man with the word “paradise” written on a piece of paper taped to his shirt walked by, headed to the front lines.

Magdy Soliman, a 38-year-old computer programmer, volunteered to be my guide for the day and help me get the lay of the land. At a dingy downtown cafe, smoking harsh, honey-flavored shisha and drinking tea from grubby glass cups, his two friends—both with master’s degrees in agricultural engineering—told me of how they had to pay bribes for “everything” involving the government. “I have to pay some guy 600 Egyptian pounds to get a driver’s license,” said Ahmed Khalil, 35. “Why? It’s my right. We want to smell freedom.”

Soliman asked me whether I thought the protesters were going to win. I told him I wasn’t sure but that I hoped so.

“A lot of people will get arrested,” he worried. Ahmed was blunter: “They will kill us for sure.”

Mubarak did not, of course, depart that Friday.

Over the weekend, momentum seemed to shift further against the protesters. A self-appointed group of prominent “wise men” stepped forward to negotiate a solution to the standoff. Mubarak’s new vice president, former spy chief Omar Suleiman, made a public show of magnanimity by sitting

down with various figures from the traditional opposition, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood—the same group Mubarak’s police state had spent years persecuting. He then issued a deeply disingenuous statement that seemed crafted to offer symbolic concessions without conceding real power or control over the pace of reform. Message: The government is being reasonable while you kids in Tahrir Square are bent on destroying Egypt. Time to go home. On Sunday, Feb. 6, banks opened across the country, and the government urged people to go back to work. Instead of killing protesters, the regime would now ignore them.

The crowds were dwindling, and yet the Tahriris held firm. They announced a “week of resilience,” signaling that they were hunkering down for a long struggle. On Sunday, Feb. 6, the “day of the martyrs,” huge images of fallen heroes, some showing smiling faces, others grim shots of bloodied corpses, decorated the square. Meanwhile, the protesters adamantly refused to negotiate until Mubarak stepped down.

If there was a turning point, it was a heartfelt interview on the night of Monday, Feb. 7, by Wael Ghonim, a key protest organizer whose sudden disappearance had become an international cause célèbre. Ghonim, an articulate Google executive, effectively gutted the regime’s propaganda campaign against the protesters, weeping as he insisted that the youth in Tahrir Square only wanted what was best for Egypt. The next day’s protests were the biggest yet.

From Tuesday, Feb. 8, onward, the protesters pressed their advantage as cracks began to show in the regime and new civic groups joined the revolution. Demonstrations and strikes broke out within ministries and syndicates and in factories across Egypt. Suddenly, thousands of professors, judges, lawyers, and delegations from distant governorates were marching on Tahrir. On Wednesday, Feb. 9, in their boldest move yet, a group of protesters seized the street in front of the parliament building before the Army could react and rushed in blankets and tents for an extended sit-in. On Thursday evening, after a drumbeat of leaks and statements suggesting Mubarak was planning to step down proved overly optimistic, an angry crowd blockaded the state television building. And on Friday, Feb. 11, seemingly the entire country took to the streets as rumors spread that Mubarak had fled Cairo, if not Egypt altogether.

And then, with a short, lugubrious statement from Suleiman, it was over. Mubarak was out, and the military was in command.

For now, as the country erupts in ecstatic celebrations, Egyptians are choosing to be hopeful.

“Of course we trust them,” Dalia Ziada, a local civic organizer for the American Islamic Congress, said of the military, just after Mubarak’s resignation was announced. “They never harmed anyone in any way. I am sure they will start to prepare for the elections. There is no political regime anymore.”

“This is the best scenario ever,” said Wael Nawara, secretary-general of the liberal Ghad Party. “The Army is promising the Egyptian people what they shed blood for.”

“It’s the only possible solution,” Hassan Nafaa, a political scientist at Cairo University, told me. “Now we will have to watch carefully what the military will do.”

The task now, says Nafaa, is for military leaders to lay out their political vision for the coming months. In recent days, opposition leaders put together a road map that includes a new government of national unity, the dissolution of the state security apparatus, an overhaul of the police, the complete independence of the press, and free and fair elections—but it’s still not clear what sort of consensus has been built around it.

Mubarak is gone, but Egypt’s transition to democracy is far from ensured. What actually happened Friday was a coup—not a revolution. And nobody yet knows whether the military, which has shown few democratic inklings in its nearly 60 years as the power behind the throne, truly intends to carry out its promises to upend the ruling order. Mubarak’s vast state security apparatus remains intact, and now that the dictator is gone, opposition leaders may well return to bickering among themselves. It’s also not clear what role the autocratic Suleiman—who said this week that Egypt has no “culture of democracy”—might play in the months ahead.

“Call me a party pooper, but I do not see Mubarak’s resignation necessarily good news at this point for the opposition,” said Nathan J. Brown, a leading scholar of Arab political systems. “They got what they said they wanted, but this is not a transition yet. It could still be a kinder, gentler Algeria.”

FEBRUARY 12: AFTER THE PARTY

BY ASHRAF KHALIL

It's the nature of the modern news/punditry cycle that people are constantly looking to move on to the next discussion topic and increasingly unable to simply savor the moment—without parsing it to death for deeper meaning. That truth was never more evident than on Friday night as seemingly all of Cairo devolved into a euphoric “We won the World Cup”-level street party.

Around 11 p.m., I visited my friend, Issandr El Amrani, a fellow Foreign Policy contributor and author of the must-read Arabist blog. He lives about a 10-minute walk from Tahrir Square, so his apartment became a gathering point for people heading to and from the celebrations. A diverse collection of journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens tramped through in various states of joyous inebriation. On the muted television screen behind us, a news channel ran the crawler, “How will Egypt’s revolution affect Israel?”

It's safe to say that nobody celebrating in Egypt last night was giving a single second's thought to that question—or any of the other myriad what-ifs being floated by the non-Egyptian media. Indeed in several hours of wandering and querying celebrants, it was hard to find anyone who was even all that worried about what the future would hold.

As Ahmed Morsi, a 27-year-old taxi driver told me, “The road ahead will have some difficulties, but no matter how hard it is, it really can't be worse than the last 10 years or so.”

Still, as Cairo's revolutionary hangover gives way to the clear light of day this weekend, a number of “what's next?” questions do present themselves.

What will the transitional government look like?

So far, Egypt seems to be in the hands of all military men—the Supreme

Council of the Armed Forces. But the protesters are going to want to see some civilian authority figures introduced into the mix fairly soon. Names like Mohamed ElBaradei, Nobel Prize- winning scientist Ahmed Zewail, and outgoing Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa are certain to be floated. But also look for some new young leaders who emerged from the movement in the past three pressurized weeks to also play a role.

“These youth, they should be the ministers,” said Sayed El Mahrakany, a professor of surgery at Ain Shams University, who repeatedly came to Tahrir with his two teenage daughters. “Our generation failed to achieve our revolution.”

What about Omar Suleiman?

Egypt’s former intelligence chief is now vice president of a country without a president. But it’s unclear just what, if any, role he will be playing going forward. One of the more fascinating subplots of the past two weeks was that Suleiman’s formal introduction to the Egyptian people was a complete PR disaster.

For years, Egyptians saw and heard about Suleiman but actually never heard him speak. When he did start making public statements after Mubarak elevated him to vice president, Suleiman managed to alienate almost all of the protesters by coming off as condescending, dismissive of the movement, and reliant on antiquated regime rhetoric.

His sit-down with Christiane Amanpour was borderline comical. He repeatedly accused the “Brother Muslimhood” of fueling the unrest and said the “culture of democracy” doesn’t exist in Egypt yet. It was so tone-deaf that U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, previously regarded as a Mubarak apologist, responded with an angry demand that the notorious “emergency laws” be immediately repealed. After years of being one of the main contenders to succeed Mubarak, Suleiman may find himself just as unemployable as his former boss.

Do the protesters trust the military?

This is shaping up to be the psychological litmus test for how different protesters view the future, and opinions on the matter seem to be truly split. A healthy percentage of the core Tahrir demonstrators regard the fight as

only partially won and will not rest until Egypt's governance is out of the hands of the military.

"A real democratic Egypt is not necessarily the Egypt that the generals and the United States want to see," said longtime activist Hossam Hamalawy on Al Jazeera on Friday night. "I do not trust those generals."

So far, the ruling Supreme Armed Forces Council seems to be saying all the right things. In its fourth post-Mubarak communiqué on Saturday, the council affirmed its commitment to "continue working to transfer power to a free, democratic civilian authority."

Many Egyptians are willing to give it the benefit of the doubt for now. "I don't think most people would have a problem having an interim military rule; we have a lot of trust in the Army," Mohammed Moawad, a 34-year-old bank employee, told me.

But even Moawad warned that the military will find itself dealing with another uprising if it drags its feet. "Just as we stood against Mubarak, we'd stand against them if they tried to hold on to power," he said.

And yes, what about Israel?

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu didn't do Mubarak any favors over the last two weeks with his spirited defense of the regime. But Netanyahu's concerns reflect a clear anxiety over how a post-Mubarak government that actually reflects the will of the Egyptian people might deal with the Jewish state.

Since the start of the revolution on Jan. 25, foreign-policy issues generally took a back seat to domestic grievances. But there will definitely come a time when the terms of Egypt's long-standing "cold peace" with Israel will come under review.

In the short term, not much should change. Saturday's military communiqué contained assurances—seemingly aimed directly at Washington and Tel Aviv—that "all regional and international agreements" would be honored during the interim period.

One possible short-term change could involve the handling of Egypt's Rafah land-crossing with the Gaza Strip, which Mubarak kept largely closed. In the aftermath of Mubarak's resignation, the Gaza-based leadership of Hamas hailed the achievements of the protesters and put in an early

request that Rafah be truly reopened on a permanent basis for all manner of goods and material.

On all these matters, we'll know more in the days ahead, but probably not until Egyptians recover from a well-deserved hangover.

CHAPTER 4

Revolution Makers



WAEEL GHONIM IN TAHRIR SQUARE, FEB. 8, 2011 (PHOTO BY JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES)

“Should I become a thief? Should I die?”

—Mohamed Bouazizi, Dec. 17

“A couple of months ago I went to a wake, and I was looking at people sitting in front of me. I told my brother, ‘I look in the eyes of these people and they’re dead. Dead souls. They lost every inch or iota of humanity, dignity, sense of freedom, sense of confidence—everything was dead.’

I went to Tahrir Square last week and you see different people. You see people for the first time feeling they are free.”

—Mohamed ElBaradei, Feb. 10

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By Ellen Knickmeyer

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The Hopeful Network

By Maryam Ishani

**We Need to 'Keep Kicking Their Behinds': Mohamed ElBaradei
on His New Life of Protest**

Interview by Blake Hounshell

The Al Jazeera Effect

By Hugh Miles

INTRODUCTION

Every uprising has its unheralded heroes, be it the army general who refuses orders to fire on innocent civilians, the broadcaster who denounces his former puppet masters on state television, the musician who pens the anthem that awakens the masses, or the elderly grandmother who stares down the shock troops of the *ancien régime* and refuses to submit.

But it is the true believers, the visionaries who dare to dream in isolation and bravery of a new order, who make revolutions possible. The Arab world is no different. From youthful Facebook organizers to retired diplomats, crusading journalists to Serbian activists, these revolutions have seen their share of inspiring protagonists. And yet, in this new age of social networks, text-messaging, and satellite television, the Arab revolt is remarkable for its lack of charismatic leaders. In Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen—and wherever the revolution ultimately spreads—previously apolitical young people, not politicians, have so far been leading the way. But to where?

THE ARAB WORLD'S YOUTH ARMY

BY ELLEN KNICKMEYER

SIDI BOUZID, Tunisia — On the gray winter mornings at this out-of-the-way farm town on the scrubby brown steppes between the Mediterranean coast and the Sahara desert, you still see a few old farmers in hooded brown cloaks rolling to market on donkey carts. The occasional old woman, hunched against the cold, comes down the main road through town, tugging a camel.

But come about 9 a.m. in Sidi Bouzid—where 26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi lived, burned himself to death, and launched a new wave of revolution in the Arab world—the blue metal courtyard gates creak open on the squat stucco houses around where he used to live. Out marches an army: broad-shouldered men in their 20s and early 30s in hooded sweatshirts. Young women, crisply dressed in fashionable calf-high boots, clinging long sweaters, and humongous bug-eyed sunglasses. The crowd, growing in number as it streams into Sidi Bouzid's main streets, strides purposefully out of narrow neighborhood gravel lanes smelling of dried sewage.

Those still in school proceed to the classroom, while those without jobs make their way to Sidi Bouzid's coffee shops. But where they—the Arab world's youth army—are headed right now is, effectively, nowhere. North Africa and the Middle East now have the highest percentage of young people in the world. Sixty percent of their people are under 30, twice the rate of North America, according to a study from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. And with the unemployment rate at 10 percent or more, North Africa and the Middle East also have the highest regional rates of joblessness in the world. For the region's young people, it's four times that.

The unhappy youth in Tunisia are not alone in the Arab world. Young

Egyptians drove the revolt that pushed President Hosni Mubarak from office, and other crowds have shaken the streets of Sanaa, Algiers, and Amman. Rather than the Arab world's usual suspects—bearded Islamists or jaded leftists—it is young people, angry at the lack of economic opportunity available to them, who are risking their lives going up against police forces.

It's no coincidence, the young people of Sidi Bouzid told me, that the public uprisings surging across the Middle East and North Africa started here.

"Every day, my mother tells me go look for a job, why don't you get a job, get a job," said Sofiene Dhouibi, 24, when we met in January in Sidi Bouzid. "But I know there is no job."

"I look. Really, I look. But there is no job," he added, so instead he spends his days doing something so common among North Africa's unemployed that it has earned its own trade name—the *hittistes*, meaning, in Arabic slang, those who lean up against the wall.

The oldest of three children, the son of an ambulance driver and a mother who makes spare cash selling olives from the family's groves, Dhouibi spent one-third of his family's monthly income of \$210 each month for four years to earn a university degree. When the degree failed to land him a job, his parents doubled down and sent him to school for another two years, for a master's in computer technology.

Now two years on the job market with no job, Dhouibi—polite, earnest, thoughtful, and fluent in three languages—spends his morning with other unemployed high school and college graduates at the stand-up tables in Sidi Bouzid's Café Charlotte. He nurses a coffee, thanks to the change his mother gives him from her olive sales. He goes home for lunch, visits an Internet cafe in the afternoon, returns home for dinner, sleeps in a room with his brother, and wakes, hopeless, in the morning to do it all again.

"Imagine your life going on like this," he said at the Café Charlotte, standing over the coffee that was the treat of his day. "Every day the same."

When Bouazizi, a hard-working fruit-seller sent into a blind rage by a bribe-seeking policewoman who confiscated his wares and slapped him, immolated himself on Dec. 17, Dhouibi was there for the first of the demonstrations that followed.

His best friend, a newly graduated mechanical engineer with better fam-

ily connections and better job prospects, hung back. But Dhouibi threw himself into the swelling protest movement. On the second day of the demonstrations, he pushed to the front of the crowd and helped push a police car out into the street. He helped set it ablaze.

"I felt frightened of the government," Dhouibi told me. "But I felt happy. Very happy."

"No to youth unemployment," graffiti newly painted on a statue in the town's square says. "No to poverty."

Dhouibi has gone back to protest every day since then. He turns up outside the gates of the local union hall, talking to other young men until the day's march takes shape. Even after protests built around the country, reached Tunis, and forced Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia's president of 23 years, to flee the country, Tunisians have kept up the demonstrations to demand the resignations of the last ministers of a ruling party that brought economic wealth and political power for the elite, but few jobs or rights for the middle class and poor.

Of the 1,400 classmates who went to school with Bouazizi, perhaps 4 or 5 percent have found jobs in the years since, estimated Tarek Hajlaoui, an economics teacher who taught Bouazizi.

"Of course, officially, I encourage my students about the advantages of education, encourage them to go on to university for the sake of their futures," Hajlaoui told me, when I spoke with him at a gas station's coffee counter. "But in reality..."

Some political scientists warn of the dark side of the "youth bulge." A study by Population Action International asserted that 80 percent of the world's conflicts between 1970 and 1999 started in countries where 60 percent of the population was under 30. (Of course, other factors—such as the Cold War—also played a role.)

Political scientists and development economists like Tarik Yousef, founding dean of the Dubai School of Government, saw the Middle East and North African youth bulge coming for years. They urged Arab leaders to harness the skilled, eager, and educated labor force flooding on to the market. The youth bulge could have been "a precondition for problems, or a precondition for prosperity," Yousef told me.

The high unemployment rate today suggests the course the region's gov-

ernments took.

“This decade of underachievement by educated Tunisians, especially, created a humiliated” generation—now no longer in their first youth, but in their disillusioned late 20s and early 30s, Yousef pointed out.

The grievances of the young—and now not-so-young—have been building for years. In the Libyan capital, Tripoli, I met a 31-year-old man, Abdel Basat al-Asady, who daydreamed about marriage with the eagerness of a teenage consumer of *Brides* magazine. It was a pipe dream for Asady, though. With jobs and housing as short in Libya as elsewhere, he had no prospect of launching his adult life.

He took me to his parents’ house, where he and his five grown brothers and sisters, all unemployed or underemployed, pulled from their closets the plastic-and-cardboard wrapped wedding clothes they had already bought in hope of the day each could begin a family. Wedding expenses in the Middle East, with their feasts, gifts, and mandated dowries, run about two and a half times a family’s annual income. Absent some unlooked-for boon, no one in Asady’s family would be wearing their wedding clothes for years.

In Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen—everywhere in the Middle East and North Africa where I went the subject came up—people complained of the corruption that crushes even their last hopes. Getting a job takes *wasta*—connections—to a country’s ruling party, tribal leader, or a powerful businessman.

In all those countries, frustrated job-seekers I’ve talked to say, it takes money, too.

“I would bribe, but I don’t know anyone high up enough to bribe,” Dhouibi said.

“I don’t have money, but if we just got the chance, I would get the money, to get him a job,” Dhouibi’s kerchiefed mother said, serving me fruit juice in her home of stucco-covered concrete blocks, with a weathered red geranium pushing out of the packed-dirt courtyard outside.

Bouazizi himself, the oldest of six children, never complained of his lot in life, Bouazizi’s mother, Manoubia, told me.

Bouazizi was 3 when neighbors carried into the house the body of his father, dead of heart troubles on the job as a low-paid laborer in neighboring Libya. Mohamed Bouazizi was 12 when he started working part time, studying by school at day and working for fruit vendors by night. He was

17 when he quit school to work full time so that his younger brothers and sisters could stay in school and his sister, Leila, could go to college.

But he snapped one morning when a policewoman who tormented him for bribes confiscated his fruit—depriving him of the 5 dinar, or \$3, he hoped to make for his family that day. The policewoman slapped him when he tried to take them back. Bouazizi fell to the ground then, crying, his mother recounted.

“Should I become a thief? Should I die?” Bouazizi shouted at the police-woman, according to a friend who watched it all and told Bouazizi’s mother. Bouazizi pushed his empty fruit cart to the front gates of the provincial governorate and doused himself with one and a half liters of gasoline. Then he pulled out a match and struck it—igniting not only himself, but the frustrations of Arab youth everywhere.

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REVOLUTION U

BY TINA ROSENBERG

Early in 2008, workers at a government-owned textile factory in the Egyptian mill town of El-Mahalla el-Kubra announced that they were going on strike on the first Sunday in April to protest high food prices and low wages. They caught the attention of a group of tech-savvy young people an hour's drive to the south in the capital city of Cairo, who started a Facebook group to organize protests and strikes on April 6 throughout Egypt in solidarity with the mill workers. To their shock, the page quickly acquired some 70,000 followers.

But what worked so smoothly online proved much more difficult on the street. Police occupied the factory in Mahalla and headed off the strike. The demonstrations there turned violent: Protesters set fire to buildings, and police started shooting, killing at least two people. The solidarity protests around Egypt, meanwhile, fizzled out, in most places blocked by police. The Facebook organizers had never agreed on tactics, whether Egyptians should stay home or fill the streets in protest. People knew they wanted to do something. But no one had a clear idea of what that something was.

The botched April 6 protests, the leaders realized in their aftermath, had been an object lesson in the limits of social networking as a tool of democratic revolution. Facebook could bring together tens of thousands of sympathizers online, but it couldn't organize them once they logged off. It was a useful communication tool to call people to—well, to what? The April 6 leaders did not know the answer to this question. So they decided to learn from others who did. In the summer of 2009, Mohamed Adel, a 20-year-old blogger and April 6 activist, went to Belgrade, Serbia.

The Serbian capital is home to the Center for Applied NonViolent Action

and Strategies, or CANVAS, an organization run by young Serbs who had cut their teeth in the late 1990s student uprising against Slobodan Milosevic. After ousting him, they embarked on the ambitious project of figuring out how to translate their success to other countries. To the world's autocrats, they are sworn enemies—both Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Belarus's Aleksandr Lukashenko have condemned them by name. ("They think we are bringing a revolution in our suitcase," one of CANVAS's leaders told me.) But to a young generation of democracy activists from Harare to Rangoon to Minsk to Tehran, the young Serbs are heroes. They have worked with democracy advocates from more than 50 countries. They have advised groups of young people on how to take on some of the worst governments in the world—and in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria-occupied Lebanon, the Maldives, and now Egypt, those young people won.

In Belgrade, Adel took a week-long course in the strategies of nonviolent revolution. He learned how to organize people—not on a computer, but in the streets. And most importantly, he learned how to train others. He went back to Egypt and began to teach. The April 6 Youth Movement, along with a similar group called Kefaya, became the most important organizers of the 18-day peaceful uprising that culminated in President Hosni Mubarak's departure on Feb. 11. "The April 6 Movement and Kifaya are the groups that have led the charge in actually getting protesters organized and onto the streets," a Feb. 3 report from the geopolitical analysis group Stratfor said. The tactics were straight out of CANVAS's training curriculum. "I got trained in how to conduct peaceful demonstrations, how to avoid violence, and how to face violence from the security forces ... and also how to organize to get people on the streets," Adel said of his experience with the Serbs, in an interview with Al Jazeera English on Feb. 9. "We were quite amazed they did so much with so little," Srdja Popovic, one of CANVAS's leaders, told me.

As nonviolent revolutions have swept long-ruling regimes from power in Tunisia and Egypt and threaten the rulers of nearby Algeria, Bahrain, and Yemen, the world's attention has been drawn to the causes—generations of repressive rule—and tools—social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter—animating the wave of revolt. But as the members of the April 6 movement learned, these elements alone do not a revolution make. What does?

In the past, the discontented availed themselves of the sweeping forces of geopolitics: the fall of regimes in Latin America and the former Soviet bloc was largely a product of the withdrawal of superpower support for dictatorships and the consolidation of liberal democracy as a global ideal. But the global clash of ideologies is over, and plenty of dictators remain—so what do we do?

The answer, for democratic activists in an ever-growing list of countries, is to turn to CANVAS. Better than other democracy groups, CANVAS has built a durable blueprint for nonviolent revolution: what to do to grow from a vanload of people into a mass movement and then use those masses to topple a dictator. CANVAS has figured out how to turn a cynical, passive, and fearful public into activists. It stresses unity, discipline, and planning—tactics that are basic to any military campaign, but are usually ignored by nonviolent revolutionaries. There will be many moments during a dictatorship that galvanize public anger: a hike in the price of oil, the assassination of an opposition leader, corrupt indifference to a natural disaster, or simply the confiscation by the police of a produce cart. In most cases, anger is not enough—it simply flares out. Only a prepared opponent will be able to use such moments to bring down a government.

“REVOLUTIONS ARE OFTEN SEEN AS SPONTANEOUS,” Ivan Marovic, a former CANVAS trainer, told me in Washington a few years ago. “It looks like people just went into the street. But it’s the result of months or years of preparation. It is very boring until you reach a certain point, where you can organize mass demonstrations or strikes. If it is carefully planned, by the time they start, everything is over in a matter of weeks.”

CANVAS is hardly the first organization to teach people living under dictatorship the skills they can use to overthrow it; the U.S. government and its allies have funded democracy-promotion organizations around the world since the early years of the Cold War. Living under two dictatorships—Chile under Augusto Pinochet and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas—and visiting perhaps a dozen others, I had seen armies of them at work and served as an election monitor myself. But I had never seen anything like CANVAS.

Traditional democracy-promotion groups like to collaborate with well-credentialed opposition parties and civil society groups; CANVAS prefers

to work with rookies. The theory is that established parties and organizations under a dictator are usually too tired and tainted to be able to topple him, and that hope rests instead with idealistic outsiders, often students. The Serbs are not the usual highly paid consultants in suits from wealthy countries; they look more like, well, cocky students. They bring a cowboy swagger. They radiate success. Everyone they teach wants to do what the Serbs did.

If CANVAS has torn up the old democracy-promotion playbook, it's because the group's leaders have drawn up a new one, taken from their own firsthand experience. The group traces its roots to an October 1998 meeting in a cafe in Belgrade, where Popovic, a tall, sharp-featured man, then 25 and a student of marine biology at Belgrade University, had called several of his fellow students together. At the time, Milosevic had been in office for nine years and was firmly entrenched in power. He had started and lost three wars and was in the process of launching a fourth, in Kosovo. Popovic and his friends had been active in student protests for years. They had marched for 100 days in a row, but their efforts had yielded next to nothing. "It was a meeting of desperate friends," Popovic says. "We were at the bottom of a depression."

The students christened themselves Otpor!—"Resistance!" in Serbian—and began rethinking revolution. The first and most daunting obstacle was the attitude of their countrymen. Surveys taken by the opposition showed that most Serbs wanted Milosevic to go. But they believed his ouster was simply impossible, or at least too dangerous to try. And Serbia's extant political opposition was hardly inspiring: Even the anti-Milosevic parties were largely vehicles for their leaders' personal ambitions.

But Otpor's founders realized that young people *would* participate in politics—if it made them feel heroic and cool, part of something big. It was postmodern revolution. "Our product is a lifestyle," Marovic explained to me. "The movement isn't about the issues. It's about my identity. We're trying to make politics sexy." Traditional politicians saw their job as making speeches and their followers' job as listening to them; Otpor chose to have collective leadership, and no speeches at all. And if the organization took inspiration from Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., it also took cues from Coca-Cola, with its simple, powerful message and strong brand. Otpor's

own logo was a stylized clenched fist—an ironic, mocking expropriation of the symbol of the Serb Partisans in World War II, and of communist movements everywhere.

Otpor steered clear of the traditional opposition tactics of marches and rallies—partly out of necessity, because the group didn't have enough people to pull them off. Instead of political parties' gravity and bombast, Otpor adopted the sensibility of a TV show its leaders had grown up watching: *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Its daily work consisted of street theater and pranks that made the government look silly and won coverage from opposition media. Wit was perhaps not always achieved, but it was always the aim.

The most famous stunt involved an oil barrel painted with Milosevic's picture. Otpor rolled it down a busy street, asking people to insert a coin in a slot for the privilege of whacking Milosevic with a bat. This was Otpor's favorite kind of prank, a dilemma action: It left the regime damned either way. If the government had let the barrel roll, it would have looked weak. But when the police stepped in, the optics were no better: The Otpor members fled, and the opposition TV the next day showed pictures of the police "arresting" a barrel and loading it into the police van. The country sniggered at these pranks—and signed up for Otpor.

Rather than trying to avoid arrests, Otpor decided to provoke them and use them to the movement's advantage. After a few months it became evident that while police would rough up Otpor members, torture was rare and few of them would even be kept overnight. When any Otpor member was arrested, the organization sent a noisy crowd to hang out on the street outside the police station. Detainees would emerge from the police station to find a pack of opposition journalists and a cheering crowd of friends. Young men competed to rack up the most arrests. If wearing Otpor's signature fist-emblazoned black T-shirt made you an insider in the revolution, getting arrested made you a rock star. People who once thought of themselves as victims learned to think of themselves as heroes.

Two years after its founding, Otpor's 11 members had become more than 70,000. "The signal thing they did that should never be lost is that they made it OK for Serbs to say publicly that the regime was not invincible, that many Serbs shared a sense that change could come," said James O'Brien, the Clinton administration's special envoy to the Balkans. By the time Milos-

evic ran for reelection as president of Yugoslavia in September 2000, Otpor's prolonged protest campaign—and Milosevic's attempts to suppress it—had eroded the president's popularity and emboldened and helped to unify the opposition. When Milosevic refused to concede defeat to opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica, Otpor's example of disciplined nonviolence, along with its masses of activists, were crucial in convincing Serbia's security forces to defy Milosevic's orders to shoot at the protesters. On Oct. 7, the embattled president resigned.

The unthinkable had happened. For the young Serbs, the next step was figuring out how to export it.

Within a few months of Milosevic's ouster, Otpor's leaders began to get calls from democracy activists in other countries eager to copy the movement's success. Slobodan Djinnovic, one of Otpor's original organizers, began traveling to Belarus, meeting clandestinely with a student movement there. It was soon infiltrated, however, and eventually collapsed.

Djinnovic had more success in Georgia, where a group of young people had founded a movement called Kmara! ("Enough!"). In 2002, Djinnovic and other Otpor leaders began visiting, and hosting Kmara students in Serbia. After Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet functionary who had served as Georgia's president since 1995, stole the country's November 2003 elections, a movement led by Kmara forced him out in what became known as the Rose Revolution. It was followed by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, where former Otpor activists spent months advising the Pora ("It's Time") youth movement.

On a trip to South Africa to train Zimbabweans in 2003, Djinnovic and Popovic decided to establish CANVAS. At the time, Popovic was a member of parliament, but he stepped down in 2004, preferring a career as an organizer and a revolutionary. Djinnovic had founded Serbia's first wireless Internet service provider in 2000 and was well on his way to becoming a mogul. Today he is head of Serbia's largest private internet and phone company and funds about half of CANVAS's operating expenses and the costs for half the training workshops out of his own pocket. (CANVAS has four and a half staff employees. The trainers are veterans of successful democracy movements in five countries and are paid as contractors. CANVAS participates in some workshops financed by the Organization for Security and Coopera-

tion in Europe, the United Nations Development Program, an international NGO called Humanity in Action, and Freedom House, an American group which gets its money from the U.S. government. But CANVAS prefers to give Washington a wide berth, in part due to Otpor's experience. Like the entire opposition to Milosevic, Otpor took money from the U.S. government, and lied about it. When the real story came out after Milosevic fell, many Otpor members quit, feeling betrayed.)

Most of CANVAS's work is with democracy activists from the middlingly repressive countries that make up the majority of the world's dictatorships. All its successes have been; the Serbs have helped overthrow the low-hanging fruit of autocracy. Whatever one might say about Shevardnadze's Georgia, it wasn't North Korea. So last year I decided to watch Popovic and Djinnovic work with activists from a country that would put their ideas to the severest test yet: Burma.

IN 1962, A MILITARY COUP LED BY GEN. NE WIN PUT AN END to the democratic government that had ruled Burma since its independence 14 years earlier. In the intervening half-century there have only been a few brief moments when it was reasonable for the Burmese to hope for something better. Anti-government demonstrations erupted for months in 1988, but ended after soldiers killed thousands of protesters. Two years later, Burma held the first free elections since the coup. But when Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, won an overwhelming victory, the regime nullified the results.

Mass protest did not return until September 2007, when the government removed oil subsidies without warning and the price of some fuels rose by 500 percent. Buddhist monks protested the price hikes, only to be beaten by security forces. A monk in Rangoon named Ashin Kovidā, a small, soft-spoken man of 24, was outraged. He sold his robes and used the money to make and photocopy a leaflet inviting the monks in Rangoon's monasteries to march. On Sept. 19, about 400 monks did, joined by students in what became known—after one of the colors of the monks' robes—as the Saffron Revolution.

Kovidā, who now lives in exile in California, told me he was inspired by *Bringing Down a Dictator*, a documentary about the fall of Milosevic that

had been subtitled in Burmese and circulated clandestinely in the country. He thought the government would not dare to shoot monks. He was wrong. Dozens of people were killed, and thousands of monks and nuns were arrested; some of them were handed sentences of more than 60 years. Burma's opposition fell silent again; elections were held in November, 2010, but brought the country only token change.

There are still Burmese, however, willing to take risks for real democracy. Last year, 14 of them, most of them very young, gathered in a hotel conference room outside of Burma for a CANVAS workshop. They had been brought together by a veteran opposition activist who asked to be identified only by his nickname, K2. (The presence of a reporter and photographer was carefully negotiated to protect the participants' safety: I could not identify the Burmese or mention the date or location of the workshop.)

This was new ground for the Serbs—CANVAS had worked with Burmese exiles, but these were people who lived inside the country. The Serbs worried about the fact that the students did not know each other. Mistrust could be fatal. Popovic once taught a group that included both opposition party youth and nongovernmental groups from Zimbabwe. They were all against the dictator, Robert Mugabe—but they also hated each other. “Endless war,” was how he characterized it. In a country like Burma, people feared those they did not know. The Serbs thought that this could be trouble.

And of course, Burma was not Ukraine. The less developed the democracy movement, the longer it takes for the gears to start turning. The countries whose activists had caught on the quickest, the Serbs said, were Georgia and Vietnam. The Burmese were more likely to respond like others from totalitarian countries had. “Belarus,” said DjinoVIC, shaking his head. “They were extremely tough to motivate—extremely passive. I couldn't find the spark in their eyes.” And then there were the North Koreans: “They were great young students in a big hotel in Seoul,” Popovic told me. “We worked for two days and had no idea how the hell we were doing. People didn't change the expression on their faces. They sat like monuments. It was awful.”

With Africans, Latin Americans, and Georgians, the CANVAS trainers were loose and lively—“Serb style,” Popovic called it. With people from Asia, the Middle East and most of Eastern Europe, they tried to be more formal. But while the style needed adaptation, the curriculum stayed the

same. It was developed for the first two ongoing conflicts where they had worked, Zimbabwe and Belarus—places that differed in every possible way. Middle Eastern students, DjinoVIC said, sometimes argued that the strategies wouldn't work in the Islamic world. But CANVAS's only successes outside the former Soviet Union had come in Lebanon and the Maldives, both predominantly Muslim countries.

When Popovic asked the Burmese what they hoped to learn from the week, their answers focused on two issues: mobilizing people and overcoming fear. "We are afraid of what we are doing," said a tall man. "We have the 'there is nothing we can do' syndrome. We have never tasted freedom." One young woman pointed out that the government considers any meeting of more than five people to be illegal. "Nonviolent struggle is very risky," she said.

The Burmese were exhibiting the most formidable challenge facing CANVAS in countries without a history of effective opposition: the passivity, fatalism, and fear of their citizens. CANVAS's most useful lesson is how to dismantle this barrier. "At each workshop, someone comes to me and says, 'Our case is *totally* different,'" DjinoVIC told the Burmese. There was nervous laughter. But the Burmese had a point: Anyone demented enough to roll a barrel with Than Shwe's picture on it for the citizens of Rangoon to whack would be risking not a few hours in jail, but dozens of years. What could the Serbs possibly talk about?

A lot, it turned out. Some of the students said they had thought nonviolence meant passivity—morally superior, perhaps, but naive. Popovic framed the task in terms of Sun Tzu: "I want you to see nonviolent conflict as a form of warfare—the only difference is you don't use arms," he told them. This was new. He argued that whether nonviolence was moral or not was irrelevant: It was strategically necessary. Violence, of course, is every dictator's home court. The Otpor founders also knew they could never win wide support with violence—every democracy struggle eventually needs to capture the middle class and at least neutralize the security forces.

Over and over again, DjinoVIC and Popovic hammered at another myth: that nonviolent struggle is synonymous with amassing large concentrations of people. The Serbs cautioned that marches and demonstrations should be saved for when you finally have majority support. Marches are risky—if

your turnout is poor, the movement's credibility is destroyed. And at marches, people get arrested, beaten, and shot. The authorities will try to provoke violence. One bad march can destroy a movement. Here was a point that had people nodding. "Any gathering in Rangoon is lunacy," Djino vic said.

But if not marches, then what? The Serbs showed the participants excerpts from *A Force More Powerful*, a documentary series about nonviolent struggles: Gandhi's Salt March, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and the lunch-counter sit-ins and bus boycotts of the American civil rights movement. Popovic pointed out the planning involved in these actions, and made the group list the tactics they saw: leaflets, banners, sit-ins, boycotts, picketing, music. "South Africa and Burma have a similarity: zero free media," he said. "So how do you spread the message?"

"Songs," said a man with a mustache. "Prayers and funerals," said a middle-aged woman, the oldest in the group, a stern woman the others took to calling Auntie. Popovic pounced. "So what's interesting about using funerals?" "It's the only place people can meet," a young man said.

"Funerals are a dilemma for your opponent," said Popovic. "In Zimbabwe, a gathering of five people was banned, but what if I have 5,000 people at a funeral? Whenever anyone related to the movement dies, they will gather and sing songs—and the police will not interfere! It's a real problem to tear-gas a funeral."

The next idea was one the Serbs had learned from the American academic Gene Sharp, the author of *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (a book originally published in 1993 in Thailand for Burmese dissidents), who has been called the Clausewitz of nonviolence. Popovic was first introduced to Sharp's ideas in the spring of 2000 by Robert Helvey, a former U.S. Army colonel who had served as defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Burma in the 1980s before becoming disillusioned with armed struggle. When the Otpor members met Helvey, the movement already had 20,000 active members and a formidable reputation. But the group had hit a wall—the movement was growing, but its leaders couldn't see how Otpor could turn that growth into the fall of Milosevic.

Helvey showed them how. He explained Sharp's idea that a regime stays in power through the obedience of the people it governs. The goal of a democracy movement should be to persuade people to withdraw their obedi-

ence. A government is like a building held up by pillars, Sharp explained. Otpor needed to pull Milosevic's pillars into the opposition camp.

In fact, Otpor was already doing well with two important Milosevic pillars. One was old people: They had always been Milosevic's base of support, but the constant arrests of Otpor's 16-year-olds—and the government's hysterical accusations that the students were terrorists—were getting grandma angry. The other pillar was the police. From the beginning, Otpor had treated the police as allies-in-waiting. Otpor members delivered cookies and flowers to police stations (sometimes with a TV camera in tow). Instead of howling at police during confrontations, Otpor members would cheer them.

The Serbs recounted this to the Burmese, and added another step: the power graph, a Djinovic invention. He asked the students to list various groups with influence in society, and then chart each group's level of loyalty to the regime over time. The idea was to see which groups had fluctuated—and what events in Burma's recent history provoked the change. From that they could glean clues about whom it was most profitable to woo.

The students put themselves in the shoes of Burma's police, workers, women, and other groups—what did they all want? The lists they compiled were predictable in their self-interest: Students wanted private schools, businesspeople wanted a reliable banking system, farmers wanted crop subsidies. What was interesting was what the lists *didn't* include. "Where is democracy? Human rights?" Popovic said, pointing to the lists tacked to the wall. "People don't give a shit about these things. Normally your politicians talk about things that don't matter to people. Remember Gandhi's Salt March? The issue was not 'You Brits get out!'—not officially. The issue was: 'We want to make salt.'"

APPROACHING MIDWEEK, THE SERBS WERE WORRIED. "They don't trust each other," Djinovic told me over lunch. The Burmese held a meeting on Tuesday night in K2's hotel room to air it all. They introduced themselves to each other, and set rules for the group. They figured out a common cover story to tell Burmese authorities. They ended up playing songs like "Dust in the Wind" on the guitar and singing until 3 a.m.

Things started to change the next day. Wednesday's lesson was about re-

placing tactics of concentration—rallies, demonstrations, marches—with tactics of dispersal, which are lower cost, lower pressure, and less dangerous. The Serbs talked about Chile's *cacerolazos*, or pot-banging sessions, which served to let people know that their neighbors, too, were against Pinochet. They explained the concept of dilemma actions, such as Otpor's stunt with the oil barrel. "Do a small thing and if it is successful, you have the confidence to do another one and another one," Popovic said. "You recruit people, train them, and keep them constantly active. You hit, proclaim victory—and get the hell out. If it is successful, people will come to you. Participating in small successes, you build self-confidence. Nonviolent struggle changes the way people think of themselves."

The Burmese did not seem persuaded. "So we are all putting candles in our windows at a certain time," said a young man with glasses. "They might not be able to arrest 10,000 people, but they will pick one poor guy and arrest his whole family—even his children."

Popovic agreed. "Yes, you guys have problems even if the tactic is low-risk—if it is political," he said. "But what if the issue is the government is incapable of supplying people with electrical power?"

When the Burmese divided into small groups to invent their own dilemma actions, the first group took this advice to heart. It had decided to tackle the issue of garbage, which the Rangoon government had stopped collecting. The members proposed starting with a group of 20 young people to do the work, providing gloves and masks, and trying to recruit others to join in. Then they would go to the city government, submit a petition signed by influential people, and tell them: It's your problem.

"OK, good. You're developing parallel institutions," said Popovic. This was Adam Michnik's strategy for Solidarity in Poland: Don't tear down institutions—build your own. "You did this to remove bodies after Cyclone Nargis"—the 2008 disaster that killed more than 138,000 people in Burma—"when the government would not. Now, what if the municipality doesn't care?"

"We'll dump the garbage in front of the mayor," said a tall man. Popovic laughed. "Or you could choose a lower-risk strategy—take pictures of the garbage and present them to authorities," he said.

When the next group came to the front of the room, its members were

smiling and, oddly, taking off their shoes. Their spokeswoman, a young woman in a pink shirt who was wriggling with excitement, proposed a “Barefoot Campaign,” to commemorate the monks of the Saffron Revolution, who do not wear shoes. The idea was to start with 100 young people, contacted by email and social networks. They would do something simple: go barefoot in public spaces. “We can start with the pagodas,” said Pink Shirt—no one wears shoes in a pagoda anyway. And people could walk through paint, Pink Shirt said. “We can easily measure success—if we see barefoot people and footprints everywhere.”

“When the authorities respond with arrests, how will you respond?” Auntie asked. The group had thought through this. “For safety, people can carry a pair of broken sandals in their pocket to show the police,” said a cherubic-faced young man. “Or you can say, ‘I’m getting ready to go running.’”

The tall man halted their excitement. “If the authorities see you leaving footprints, they will know and arrest you.”

“They won’t know who it was if we do it at night,” said the Cherub. “Let’s do it!” He pumped his fist in the air. Everyone laughed.

But the footprints were a problem—they could quite literally lead the police to their prey. Then a soft-spoken young woman in a gauze shirt spoke up. “There are lots of stray dogs and cats,” she said. “We can put a dish of paint in front of where they live so they will walk through it.” Cats and dogs as the foot soldiers of democracy! They looked at each other, awed by their own brilliance, and slapped hands all around.

Near the end of the week the group watched *Burma VJ*, a 2008 documentary by Danish director Anders Ostergaard about a group of clandestine Burmese video journalists, whose footage, smuggled out of the country, is often the only way the outside world knows what is happening in Burma. The film takes place during the Saffron Revolution; it is precious contraband in Burma, and most of the participants had seen it before. It is a document of hope and valor, a record of a few weeks many Burmese consider the high point of their lives. But after a week of CANVAS training, the Burmese were watching it with fresh eyes.

When the film ended, Djinovic walked to the front of the room. “So what did you think?” he said. The Cherub was wide-eyed. “This was not organized!” he said. Suddenly the Saffron Revolution looked very different. It

was so brave, so inspiring—and so improvised, foolish, and irresponsible. “People were going into the streets spontaneously, asking for something that is not achievable,” Djinovic told them, perhaps not gentle enough as he razed their heroes. “Our advice,” he said slowly, “is that you think about nonviolent struggle totally differently than you have seen in this movie.”

Silence fell over the group.

“Then you know what you have to do,” he said.

CANVAS HAS WORKED WITH ACTIVISTS FROM 50 COUNTRIES. It cannot point to 50 revolutions.

The most prosaic reason is that often the people it trains aren’t the ones in charge of a movement. Some groups, like Georgia’s and Ukraine’s dissidents, choose to model themselves on Otpor. In Iran, by contrast, though small groups of CANVAS trainees held successful actions, the leaders of the Green Revolution have not adopted Otpor’s tactics.

The more profound reason, however, is that context matters. A very closed society, the kind that most desperately needs a strong democracy movement, is the place least able to grow one. By the end of the Burma workshop, Popovic and Djinovic were content; the students had understood the lessons. But what they could do with them was not clear. On the workshop’s last day, I asked the members of the Barefoot Campaign group whether they would try to start one in Burma. The strategies were wonderful, valuable, fresh, they said—but better for someone else. “I am not sure it’s practical for me,” Pink Shirt said.

The Serbs argue that a country’s level of repression is not dispositive. Popovic told the Burmese that far more important than the government’s brutality is their own level of skill and commitment; a well-organized and committed democracy movement can gradually win enough freedom to work. “Political space is never granted. It is always conquered,” he said. It was easier to work in Serbia in 2000 than it had been in 1991 because the opposition had won important concessions over that time. “Serbia *built* those advantages,” he said. For example, it forced Milosevic to respect local election results in 1996 that left municipal television stations in opposition hands. But could this apply to Burma? Winning political space there could take decades and there was no guarantee that the country would even move

in the right direction.

Burma, however, is the extreme. Most authoritarian countries are closer to Milosevic's Serbia, or Mubarak's Egypt: autocratic governments that do permit some opposition media and political activity. Algeria, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Nicaragua, Russia, and Venezuela, to name a few, follow this model. And though the Serbs cannot carry revolution in their suitcases, their strategies can greatly increase the chance that when there is a moment that shakes a dictatorship, the opposition will be able to take advantage of it.

The Egyptian example shows how. The April 6 movement knew about Otpor and adopted the fist as its logo even before Mohamed Adel went to Belgrade. The course he took there was the same one the Burmese took. Last April, Serbian newspapers carried a front page photo of a protest in Egypt, with demonstrators waving the April 6 flag, complete with a familiar fist logo. "The Otpor fist threatening Mubarak?" the headline read. As images of demonstrators in Tahrir Square hoisting their children onto Egyptian Army tanks filtered out to the rest of the world last week, Popovic recalled that on Adel's power graph, the military loomed particularly large; it was crucial, he had realized, to pull out that pillar.

The Serbs never met Adel again, but their young Egyptian student kept emailing, occasionally pointing out mistakes in Arabic translations of CANVAS materials. He had gone home with copies of *Bringing Down a Dictator* subtitled in Arabic and continued to download books. He conducted miniature versions of the CANVAS workshop in Egypt, stressing unity, nonviolent discipline, the importance of clear goals, and keeping members engaged.

Just after the Jan. 25 protests began a 26-page pamphlet called "How to Protest Intelligently"—authored anonymously, but widely attributed to the April 6 group—began circulating in Cairo. It laid out the goals of the protests: taking over government buildings, winning over the police and Army, and protecting fellow protesters. It instructed people to carry roses, chant positive slogans, gather in their own neighborhoods, and persuade policemen to change sides by reminding them their own families could be among the protesters. It also gave practical advice on what demonstrators should wear and carry to protect themselves from tear gas and police batons. It

suggested that they carry signs reading “Police and People Together Against the Regime.”

The protests were a model of unity, tolerance, and nonviolent discipline. The different groups put aside their individual flags and symbols to show only the Egyptian flag and to speak, as much as possible, with one voice. Protesters swept the square clean and protected shops, detaining looters and making them give back the stolen goods. Coptic Christians in Tahrir Square formed ranks to protect the Muslims while they prayed; when the Christians celebrated Mass, the Muslims formed a ring around them. Together they embraced soldiers and faced the police with roses. They sang songs and wore silly hats. It had an authenticity that was uniquely Egyptian, but it was also textbook CANVAS.

CANVAS has worked with dissidents from almost every country in the Middle East; the region contains one of CANVAS’s biggest successes, Lebanon, and one of its most disappointing failures, Iran. Popovic wonders whether Iran could turn out differently next time: What would happen if the Green Movement were to organize not around election fraud, but staged a Salt March instead, focusing on unemployment, low wages, and corruption? Iran is like Tunisia and Egypt were: a young, relatively well-educated population and a corrupt authoritarian government dependent on fear to keep people in line. “Governments that rely for decades on fear become very inflexible,” said Popovic. “The pillars of the regime support it out of fear. The moment the fear factor disappears and people are fearless with the police and hugging the military, you have lost your main pillars.” Hosni Mubarak no doubt would have ruefully observed the same thing.

In Burma, it is hard to imagine what can vanquish that fear—what can turn people from passive victims into daring heroes—unless people like Pink Shirt do it themselves. In the Middle East, however, the fear is already crumbling, and the heroism is infecting country after country. This is a huge advantage. But for dictatorship to fall throughout the region, the protesters must catch more from Egypt than audacity.

Tina Rosenberg is the author of the forthcoming Join the Club: How Peer Pressure Can Transform the World, from which parts of this article are adapted.

THE HOPEFUL NETWORK

BY MARYAM ISHANI

CAIRO — Most of the world got a crash course in the Egyptian opposition movement in January, as mass protests broke out on the streets of Cairo. From all appearances, the movement emerged organically in the wake of the overthrow of the government in nearby Tunisia, as hundreds of thousands of angry citizens turned out to demand President Hosni Mubarak immediately step down. Several days after the marches began, former International Atomic Energy Agency chief and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei arrived on the scene to give the marchers in the streets a nominal leader and media-savvy public face. And shortly after that, Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, joined in, lending its political heft to the movement.

But the groundwork for the Egyptian uprising was set well before these high-profile figures and organizations became involved. Nearly three years ago, a group of youth activists with a strong sense of Internet organizing and more than a little help from abroad was preparing for a grassroots, high-tech opposition movement.

In early 2008, Ahmed Salah and Ahmed Maher, young members of the Kefaya ("Enough") opposition group that made a strong run against Mubarak in the 2005 presidential election, branched off and formed a group they called the April 6 Youth Movement. The group took its name from the date of the first demonstration it supported—a workers' strike planned for April 6, 2008, in el-Mahalla el-Kubra, an important town for the Egyptian textile industry. To galvanize the strike effort, April 6 activists used Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other new-media tools to report events, alert participants about security situations, and provide legal assistance to those

rounded up by state security forces.

But from the beginning, the group's founders were anticipating a far more critical date: the Nov. 28, 2010, parliamentary elections. With memories of Iran's post-election protests still fresh in their minds, the young activists hoped that the vote—sure to be marred by ballot stuffing, bought votes, and thuggery—would spark a mass movement that would bring Mubarak's nearly 30-year reign to an end.

By early 2009, the group's membership was 70,000 strong—still small numbers for a country of 82 million, yet it represented something genuinely new in Egypt's stagnant political environment. The young activists soon took cues from Iran's Green Movement, which was born out of the June 2009 post-election protests. They built on best practices and addressed the glaring weaknesses of the Iranian grassroots opposition movement. One of their first projects was a manual on protest methods, composed mostly of contributions from the group's members, which were solicited online. Friends passed it to friends and added ideas on topics ranging from security to graffiti. I became aware of the group in January 2010, when a fellow reporter forwarded me the manual.

In its early experiments with organizational tactics and online safety, the group sometimes reached out to some unlikely partners. Digital media experts in the organization consulted with Italian anarchist party activists for advice on how to use “ghost servers,” which bounce Internet searches to nonexistent servers to confuse any online monitoring, allowing users to share information and continue coordinating their activities in heavily monitored digital and telecom environments, such as in Egypt, where email accounts and Facebook are watched closely.

One of the key activists within this movement is 24-year-old Ramy Raoof, the online media expert for Global Voices and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, two organizations devoted to documenting and sharing information on Egypt's democratic movement.

In September 2010, Raoof shared a digital guide with me that he had created to illustrate how protesters could use mobile phones and Twitter to communicate information about arrested activists, helping lawyers to secure the release of the detainees. Raoof was also well known for the “fixes” he devised for many of the challenges activists were facing, such as

using international phone lines to text during government-imposed SMS shutdowns.

His efforts proved wildly successful. In the protests just before the November 2010 parliamentary elections, his team was able to secure the release of dozens of people from jails within hours of their arrest, sometimes by simply having a lawyer show up to dismiss unfounded and unchargeable offenses. In previous demonstrations, arrested protesters regularly disappeared into the prison system for weeks at a time, never having been charged, and emerging with horror stories of torture and significant injuries.

In addition to teaching activists about using technology to find new ways to organize, the election also taught them the power of new-media technologies to get out their message. That's where Bassem Samir comes in.

Samir is the director of the Egyptian Democratic Academy, an election monitoring group affiliated with the April 6 movement. Although he's only 28 years old, his personal experiences of detainment and harassment as a human rights officer have given him an air of exhaustion. Samir's matter-of-fact way of analyzing Egypt's confusing political realities has made him a go-to source for foreign journalists.

Watching the Iranian protests of 2009, Samir was troubled by the poor quality of the videos taken by activists. Although compelling, the images were often too shaky and confusing to be used by international media outlets, thus limiting their impact. In early 2010, Samir led a small delegation to the United States for media training, particularly focused on video reporting. A U.S. nongovernmental organization—with funding from the State Department—oversaw training sessions led by digital journalists from magazines like *Time* and documentary filmmakers affiliated with the human rights organization Witness, in which the Egyptian activists were taught basic camera operation, steady shooting, and how to use audio recording devices. They even studied effective online videos produced for a campaign aimed at installing bike lanes in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

In August 2010, Samir helped organize a collaboration between the Egyptian coalition and the Kenyan NGO Ushahidi, which develops open-source software for information collection and interactive mapping. Ushahidi sent a delegation to build the activists' online capabilities for securely

and credibly capturing raw video and reporting on the ground with mobile phones and building online content around it. The delegation experienced frequent harassment from Egyptian national security forces.

In September 2010, a group of journalists organized by a U.S. NGO traveled to Egypt to provide media-skills training to members of the April 6 movement in courses overseen by Samir. The goal was to prepare the movement's media wing to operate under intense pressure from national security forces during planned protests leading up to the November election. The trainers fanned out to cities across the country, such as opposition strongholds Port Said, Aswan, and Alexandria. Sessions lasted four days in each city, with nearly 30 trainees at a time grilling the journalists for advice. Session dates and locations were often changed up to the very last minute as the group struggled to avoid government scrutiny and monitoring.

The young April 6 activists wanted to ensure that the protests surrounding the parliamentary elections would be conducted differently (no more burning tires or charging police barricades) and meet with different results (no more floggings by the police). This time, they would be asymmetric and digital. At the end of a session on personal security practices, Samir turned to me and said, "They need to stop thinking of revolution as martyrdom. They are so used to thinking that if they don't get arrested or beaten up they aren't committed enough."

In one session, they learned about mapping tools, using open-source maps like Google Maps and UMapper to document protest events online and choose locations for potential demonstrations. Trainees examined their local streets and plotted good locations for photography. In another exercise, they closed their eyes and imagined the streets at night, crowded with protesters, with barricades, noise, gunfire. The sooner they got accustomed to the chaos of their environment, they were instructed, the faster they would be on their feet to avoid the police.

Photographers in the group drilled extensively, choosing critical shooting locations in a mock site and moving between them quickly and safely. Videographers were made to walk backward on uneven roads with the help of a "Man #2," another activist who would be a security lookout and human tripod when needed. They memorized streets in their respective cities so as not to get pinned by security forces. They were trained on how to convey

their content out of the event site safely: running exercises where photographers would hand off small memory flash cards at frequent intervals, switch cameras with activists who would pose as innocent bystanders, and send in camera teams in waves instead of all at once. Another novel tactic was carrying a decoy memory card with photos of tourist sites on it to hand over to police.

One trainer showed them the iconic image of a Sandinista throwing a Molotov cocktail; then he showed them an image of a crowd in Tehran standing over dying gasps of Neda Agha-Soltan with camera phones. The trainer said, “Your camera phone is now your Molotov cocktail.”

By the time the November 2010 elections rolled around, a new mechanism was in place. I traveled to one of the Egyptian Democratic Academy’s reporting centers on election night and observed an army of young people at computers watching information flicker across computer-generated maps. Their cell phones buzzed with incoming tweets.

The election itself proceeded as expected. The government successfully eliminated the Muslim Brotherhood from parliament, bringing the opposition’s total representation down to just 3 percent. Some videos that were captured showed men frantically filling out stacks of ballots in rows and stuffing them into boxes to be counted. But as it turned out, the post-election upheaval was not the final battle against the Mubarak regime the activists had hoped for. Demonstrations were small and scattered. Although the activists’ methods for safely coordinating and documenting the post-election events worked, the popular support wasn’t there for a large-scale mobilization, so there really wasn’t much to document in the end. Unlike in Iran, an election wouldn’t be the cause of Egypt’s uprising.

Instead, it took something entirely unexpected to turn the Arab world on its head, the suicide on Dec. 17, 2010, of an unemployed young man named Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. In Egypt itself, it was another Facebook page set up by the April 6 youth—this one devoted to the memory of Khaled Said, a man brutally killed in police custody—that sparked the beginning of the uprising. Thanks largely to the legwork done by the April 6 movement and the Egyptian Democratic Academy months earlier, Egypt’s opposition had been integrated into a closely knit online community. The movement showed up in force on Jan. 25, when the protests began.

But their years of preparation were almost immediately undermined. Just after midnight on Jan. 28, Mubarak—in an unprecedented move—shut off Internet and SMS services across the country for nearly a week.

The activists acted quickly during the blackout to create workaround solutions. Within days, clandestine FTP accounts were set up to move videos out to international news outlets. While accredited members of the media struggled to communicate and coordinate, street protesters were using landlines to call supporters, who translated and published their accounts on Twitter for an international audience hungry for news of the unfolding events.

Raoof, in particular, emerged as an invaluable source of information for the international media as they were chased off the streets during a crack-down by pro-Mubarak demonstrators on Feb. 2 and 3. He moved quickly throughout the chaotic scene to distribute emergency contact numbers to protesters facing detainment, replacing them with new numbers as soon as they were shut down by the government. Samir was on the scene as well, working to connect reports from the activists on the ground to international human rights monitors from his office across the river from Tahrir Square, and feeding images taken by activists to the international media.

With his heavy-handed attempt to shut off all communication, Mubarak in many ways paid online activists like Raoof and Samir the ultimate compliment. The Egyptian state had recognized that the new-media tools and methods they pioneered were crucial in fanning the flames of protest. Unfortunately for Mubarak, the realization came too late. The movement these activists began moved had already offline and into the streets, where it was now fueled by people who had never updated a Facebook page or sent out a tweet in their lives. By then, it was far too late to contain it.

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WE NEED TO 'KEEP KICKING THEIR BEHINDS': MOHAMED ELBARADEI ON HIS NEW LIFE OF PROTEST

INTERVIEW BY BLAKE HOUNSHELL

In his tastefully decorated villa in an exclusive suburban development to the west of Cairo, and just a few kilometers north of the Giza pyramids, Mohamed ElBaradei was holding court nearly around the clock during the crisis that rocked Egypt, meeting with opposition activists and journalists as he helped plot the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's dictatorial regime, forced from office by weeks of protests that nobody—including the Nobel Prize-winning former diplomat and head of the International Atomic Energy Agency himself—predicted.

ElBaradei, a tall, articulate technocrat who often sounds more like a detached analyst than a political leader, is an unlikely figure to be leading a revolt organized on the ground and over the Internet by a loose amalgam of youth groups and unaffiliated activists. Although he boasts nearly 40,000 followers on Twitter, he speaks somewhat awkwardly about social networking sites, visibly searching for the right terminology. (His most memorable tweet, though, was a momentous one, coming right after Mubarak's defiant speech refusing to leave office convulsed Cairo: "Entire nation is on the streets. Only way out is for regime to go. People power can't be crushed. We shall prevail. Still hope army can join.")

Yet of all the Egyptian political figures who claimed to speak for the tens

of thousands of demonstrators occupying Tahrir Square—something he was generally careful not to do—it was ElBaradei who remained the most consistent and unyielding in his condemnation of Egypt’s six decades under thinly veiled military rule and the gross corruption, socioeconomic ills, and political instability the Mubarak regime is leaving behind.

From his first return to Egypt last February, ElBaradei denounced the entire system as unsalvageable, calling instead for a nationwide campaign for genuine political reform. While Western reporters probed for signs that ElBaradei sought to contest the 2011 presidential election, his youthful supporters gathered more than a million signatures in favor of a seven-point reform platform, building a surprisingly effective grassroots organization and, as ElBaradei puts it, helping to break the “culture of fear” in Egypt.

While ElBaradei has not ruled out a run for the presidency under certain conditions, he seems to recognize that he’s not the kind of populist leader Egypt’s teeming masses have typically rallied around (a recent poll estimates his support at around 3 percent). In an exclusive interview with **Foreign Policy**, conducted at his home on Thursday, Feb. 10, ElBaradei described his role as more of a coach, dismissed the Egyptian government’s efforts to negotiate a way out of the current crisis as “faulty,” and urged the West to declare itself firmly on the side of the Egyptian people—before it’s too late:

Foreign Policy: You’ve always said that your role is to be a catalyst for change. You’re not a politician; you’re not a grassroots organizer. But now that change is starting to happen with these huge demonstrations, how do you see your role evolving?

Mohamed ElBaradei: I always said I’m an agent for change. I’m not a grassroots organizer; that is clear. I believe in a division of labor. I’m not trained to organize the grassroots, and grassroots has to come from the grassroots.

But I never said I’m not a politician. Obviously I’ve been practicing politics, if you like, for the past 30, 40 years in different [forms] either through my International Atomic Energy Agency work or before that in the diplomatic service. And that essentially is what I’ve been doing in the last year; it’s political work.

[As for] my role, since I left the agency and since I came here last February, immediately after I left the agency people asked me to participate in the process of change. Obviously, there has been a process going on for at least five years when people started.... You have seen small protests, demonstrations, but it's always been 50 to 100 people, you know. And the government was tolerating that as a sign of freedom of assembly [laughs] and never really thought that they would be a threat at any time.

I came in February. I realized that if change were to happen, it had to come at the hands of the young people. Sixty percent of the Egyptians are 30 and below. They are the ones who have no hidden agenda.

I really had very little trust in the so-called elite. These were people—some of them have become corrupted by the regime, have become part of the regime. Many of the rest have become, again, sort of.... Fear has become so ingrained in their souls, and they have families to care for, and they have seen that the regime has continued to be extremely repressive: torture, detentions, and so on. So there was a lot of culture of fear, at least for the middle-aged people who have families. [People] have lost hope, also, after 60 years. They despair that no matter what they do it won't change anything.

So between people who have been co-opted by the regime and people have been afraid and desperate, the only people left were really the young people and the Muslim Brotherhood, who are organized but have been subjected to the most cruel treatment for the last 30 years. University professors have been thrown into jail for no reason, except I think the regime has been using them [as part of] their act of deception with the West: You know, these are people who if they were ever to be allowed to take part in the political process they will turn Egypt into an Iran-style religious state or whatever form of religious extremism.

I didn't know any of the Muslim Brothers before; I'd never met one of them before I came here. They're a religiously conservative group, but they haven't been practicing any violence, at least for the last 50 years, and even before that, during the monarchy, it was for political reasons, not religious reasons. And they're not a majority. But they have credibility at least in the street because they were the ones providing social services when government was unable to do that: health care, food for the needy. And of course they had political space, quite open, because there were no organized parties

who were able to counter them with their vision, whether social democrats, liberals, leftists, what have you. There were some parties, but they came out of the womb of the regime and had no influence and most of them had no credibility.

And, of course, as a result of 60 years of repression, people lost their ability to work together. There has been a culture of distrust. Completely. Nobody trusted anybody else, and [people were] unable to understand that rational thinking and not emotion is the way to go forward. [There's an] inability to work as a team. That's something which we still see today—an inability to see that you need to work together, the synergy that comes with working together. These sort of values have been lost with a regime that has destroyed all the basic values that Egypt used to have.

FP: Are you hopeful that the youth groups will be able to organize a unified coalition?

MB: In the last year my role was to explain to the young people—these are the ones who see no future, no hope, no education, nothing that gives meaning to their lives. And when you saw them they were trying to emigrate illegally to New York and drown; then they tried again. Their lives have been reduced to zero. Basically they tried to find an alternative outside the country and died in the process.

My message to them is to try to make them feel that they are no different from other people, that they have all the tools, all the talents. The only thing missing is that they are able to organize and understand that our strength is in our numbers; that's one of the messages I kept sending to them through tweets, through meeting with them, and understanding that it's only through democracy that they will be able to change this whole system. Even their economic and social rights, the gateway to that is through them restoring the will of the people and not the will of the group of people who have continued to enrich themselves at the expense of the rest of the country—with rampant corruption, opaqueness, all that comes with an authoritarian system.

Twitter and Facebook were the media, and that was a part of it. We mobilized 1 million signatures. In this culture of fear, I tried to tell them that

what we can do is through peaceful change and use our power as people by signing a petition basically saying we need to restore our humanity through free and fair elections, democracy. I called for boycotting the [parliamentary] elections, and I called for peaceful demonstrations if the regime doesn't listen to us. And in fact the regime did not listen whatsoever.

FP: Do you think they're listening now?

MB: Well, absolutely. Unfortunately, what you see now with the regime saying "these are legitimate rights"—the right for people to run for election, judicial supervision, the need to abolish the emergency law—unfortunately, they only started to listen when people went to the street.

And of course, all of a sudden, even the Muslim Brotherhood, who had been banned, were invited to be part of the political process. So, they have no shame. They have no shame. For a year, they didn't even want to discuss one single.... Their reaction was complete defiance, complete fear[mongering] because they have no argument to make, and all they have done is [launch] a Goebbels-like propaganda machine against me—you know, that I'm coming with every foreign agenda that they can think of.

FP: You're an Israeli-Iranian agent...

MB: Yeah, Israeli-Iranian agent, American agent, anti-Islam, pro-Muslim extremist—everything you can think of—without even discussing one single issue like why can't we have guarantees for a free and fair election, why can't we have the right to establish parties, freedom of the press, all the stuff which is common sense. But they were not [discussing that] because they know that change will mean their demise. [There's a] military mentality, security mentality that has been going on for 60 years and going from bad to worse.

When you read yesterday in Voice of America that Mubarak's fortune is \$70 billion, and this is coming from the Voice of America, and when you see four or five Egyptians on *Forbes* richest-people list in a country where the per capita income is \$1,200, and at least 40 percent of people live on less than \$2 a day, around 30 percent of people are illiterate, when Egypt is

classified as a failed state.... I mean we are rock bottom in every indicator of human development.

That is the situation. They were really making fun of social media, saying, “These are the guys of the virtual world” –

FP: They’re not laughing now –

MB: Yeah, and communications on social networks turned into a physical presence on the streets. Nobody—including those who organized this demonstration on the 25th, 28th; now it’s becoming like a snowball—nobody expected it, not even the ones who were administering these Facebook pages, of course including myself. Nobody expected the numbers. The largest demonstration—which took place when this guy who got tortured and killed, Khaled Said, and I called for a moment of silence in Alexandria—it was 4,000 people, and this was supposed to be a groundbreaking record.

Then we saw this avalanche.

FP: So what was the difference between the demonstration in Alexandria and January 25?

MB: People started to gradually get self-confidence, realize that we would sacrifice our lives because our lives have no meaning; we are ready to take risks because other than that we are doomed. There was a tipping point. Nobody saw that tipping point coming. But I think it’s an accumulation of 60 years of repression and torture. Torture has become common practice, the disappearance of people.

So why the tipping point on that date? Why the tipping point in Tunisia when a guy sets himself on fire? Nobody could know; it just happened. It’s not surprising that it happened, but did anybody expect that it would happen on that day and continue with such intensity? Nobody could read that. But of course, I knew, and in my tweets a few months ago I said that this year is going to be a decisive year. But I didn’t know in what way, although I saw the cloud coming. I saw the anger; I saw the sense of humiliation, the lack of hope, lack of dignity.

A couple of months ago I went to a wake, and I was looking at people sit-

ting in front of me. I told my brother, “I look in the eyes of these people and they’re dead. Dead souls. They lost every inch or iota of humanity, dignity, sense of freedom, sense of confidence—everything was dead.”

I went to Tahrir Square last week and you see different people. You see people for the first time feeling they are free. They don’t know what to do with this freedom, but the joy of feeling free, the joy of feeling proud, the joy of having confidence that we managed to essentially destroy this regime that has been entrenched for 60 years, a military dictatorship, it’s melting away, and they saw the regime grudgingly making one concession after another.

FP: But so far there have been no fundamental concessions.

MB: So far, I think the whole process is a faulty process. You don’t get the fox to be in charge of the chicken coop. You don’t give the outgoing regime—which has been practicing dictatorship, is an authoritarian system, it’s a bunch of military people—the task of changing Egypt into a second republic, a new Egypt with democracy, freedom, rights, etc.

I don’t think they even understand what it means to be a democracy. As you heard Omar Suleiman saying, “We don’t have the culture [of democracy]...”

FP: So you don’t have any confidence that he can be the steward of a democratic transition?

MB: No. I don’t have any confidence. The process is completely faulty, the way I see it. They don’t understand, let alone are willing to move Egypt into democracy, unless we keep kicking their behinds.

And that’s what happened. You saw Mubarak’s first statement was saying, “We’ll give you a new government”—same old, worn-out tactics. A new government but no change of policy and the same people from his own party. They were kicked out and they said they would change the Constitution to allow more people to run. They got kicked out again and then they would say, “Well, Mubarak will not run.” Then they abolished the whole leadership of the party.

It is not the sign of a regime, or whatever’s left of it, that is ready to buy

into real change.

FP: What would your advice be to the young people in Tahrir Square? What do you tell them when you meet with them? To stay there until their demands are met?

MB: Yes, of course. I tell them that we have to keep pushing, we have to keep pushing until the demands are met. The first demand I think, and it's becoming almost an obsession, is for Mubarak to go. And that is, it's an emotional issue. But people understand that the regime is Mubarak, it's one person. And the departure of Mubarak will signal that we are ushered into a new Egypt. I think this is nonnegotiable. I don't think they will leave the street. And it's not only Tahrir; [it's] everywhere else. This has become the No. 1 demand. And the demand, of course, that they take charge of this process; it's the incoming regime who should take charge of the transitional period and not the outgoing regime. There is a huge issue of credibility. There is no credibility in either Mubarak or Suleiman or anybody who is associated with that regime.

It's an opaque process; it's a monologue; it's not a dialogue. And they still think they are in power while everybody knows they are completely weak and the regime is melting away.

So, my advice now to the young people and others is that we need to take charge of this transitional period of a year, and I am suggesting a presidential council of three people, a transitional government of national salvation, national unity under a caretaker government of people who have sterling reputations, have experience, and then prepare the country for free and fair elections. Abolish this Constitution, which is not worth the paper it's written on. Abolish the rigged parliament. We have to go through whatever you call it, popular legitimacy, revolutionary legitimacy.

Unfortunately, this is the only way out to build up again the pillars [of democracy]: a new constitution which is really democratic, with a president who has checks and balances [on him], limited power, a true parliament that has the power of the purse and oversight, an independent judiciary—all that comes with any democratic system.

But I don't think that process is working. Unfortunately, again, many of

the Western countries including the United States have been continuing to provide life support to [Mubarak]...

FP: Let's talk about the United States for a minute. You've been critical of Obama for not calling for Mubarak to leave; you said it was a "farce" that he hadn't.

MB: And the same with many other Western countries. Events have gone so fast, you know, nobody predicted.... It's like the 1979 Iranian Revolution in that things took everybody by surprise, including us even. And they had to adjust their policy every half-hour. As you remember, it started with Hillary Clinton saying, "We assess that the government of Egypt is stable." I took issue with that on CNN; I said she must have a different definition of stability than I do—stability meaning repression, poverty.

Anyway, she changed her position a couple of days afterward and said, "We now listen to the aspirations of the Egyptian people"; Obama said, "I hear you young people" and "the transition should begin right now." Basically, he said in a diplomatic way, "Mubarak, you need to listen and go."

Mubarak was told by everybody, in every language, in every different way of putting it: "You need to go." And for some reason, he's still hanging around.

FP: Well now it seems the United States has decided that it wants to see Omar Suleiman preside over this transition process that you don't have any confidence in –

MB: Correct. Frank Wisner, who was sent here and was a friend of Mubarak and works for a lobbying firm for the regime, said Mubarak must stay. Luckily, the United States said he only represents himself, but I was told there are many other Wisners in Washington, saying, "Well, he was our ally, providing stability"—which of course, if you are here, you see that he hasn't provided anything but increasing the trend of radicalization in Egypt. The repression, and sense of marginalization, is leading into radicalization. People lost their identification with the state and tried to wrap themselves around a distorted form of religion, many of them.

It was a ticking bomb. It was a ticking bomb ready to explode. I knew that, but when it was going to explode, nobody knew. They were still operating under the fiction that Egypt will turn into chaos when Mubarak leaves. Well, of course that's damnation of a dictatorship because [in a democracy] people come and go and there shouldn't be any instability.... Secondly, the Muslim Brotherhood are a bogeyman [that will take over the country]. And third, that immediately Egypt will go into full opposition against the United States and declare war on Israel and abolish the peace treaty.

All these are fictions. A lot of the sentiments of the people are not going to change. The fact that they support the Palestinian issue, the fact that they need to see a Palestinian state, they feel that there are double standards that are applied to the Middle East, in Palestine and Iraq and Afghanistan—this is not going to change.

But if you have a democracy, you will then be able to have a government representative of the people and be able to have peace. It will be a durable peace. What Israel doesn't understand is that, yes, they have peace, but it's a pseudo-peace. Talk to any Egyptian; where is the interaction between people? There will be peace when we have peace between the Israeli and the Egyptian people. And of course, it takes two to tango, or three, with the Americans.

Anyway, these foreign-policy issues, regional issues, are not going to change because of democracy. In fact, democracy will enable a meaningful dialogue on behalf of the Egyptian people, a different narrative, different values based on moderation and modernity and not what you see now: extremism and hype and lack of understanding. And the regime is perpetuating that.

FP: Do you worry that if the regime is able to crush the protest movement, that you'll see a further radicalization of the country?

MB: Oh, absolutely. I think if they try to do that.... I mean, now it's the whole of Egypt going out. Tomorrow you'll probably see something like 10 million people. It's the entire country of Egypt that is going out. If you try to crush them, you will then get into a bloody revolution. As JFK said, if you crush a peaceful revolution you will get a bloody revolution.

There's no going back. That is clear and has to be clear. My message is that the West now has to be very clear that they are siding with the people. They are not the ones who are going to change the system, but they have to understand that what's at stake are universal values. And if they want to solve it—and whatever trust they have here is very little, not only in Egypt but the rest of the Arab world—they have to show that they mean what they say when they talk about democracy, human rights, rule of law, what have you, and not continue to try to have a balancing act, you know, that maybe we can try to give it to Mubarak and Co. to manage that, or maybe again Suleiman.

I mean, as a person people could respect him, but he is not going to ... he doesn't have the trust or the understanding of what needs to be done. And they [the West] have to get the process of change in the hands of the people who staged the revolution: work with them, help them, and provide advice, but don't be perceived as hanging on to a dictator who has pulverized the country.

THE AL JAZEERA EFFECT

BY HUGH MILES

“Long live Al Jazeera!” chanted Egyptian protesters in Tahrir Square on Feb. 6. Many Arabs—not least the staff at Al Jazeera—had said for years that the Arab satellite network would help bring about a popular revolution in the Middle East. Now, after 15 years of broadcasting, it appeared the prediction was coming true. There is little question that the network played a key role in the revolution that began as a ripple in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, and ended up a wave that also washed away Egypt’s long-standing regime.

“We knew something was coming,” Mustafa Souag, head of news at Al Jazeera’s Arabic-language station, told me a few days before Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak’s exit. “Our main objective was to provide the most accurate and comprehensive coverage that we could by sending cameras and reporters to any place there is an event. And if you don’t have a reporter, then you try to find alternative people who are willing to cooperate because they believe in what we are doing.”

The Tunisian uprising revealed that the dogma perpetuated by the country’s regime—that it was impregnable and its security services invincible—was merely propaganda aimed at keeping Tunisia’s people subdued. Al Jazeera shared this revelation around the region live and in real time, breaking the spell that had stopped millions of ordinary people from rising up and claiming their legitimate rights. Suddenly change seemed possible everywhere across the Middle East.

“We did not foresee the drama of events, but we saw how events in Tunisia rippled out and we were mindful of the fact [that] things were changing, and so we prepared very carefully,” said Al Anstey, managing director of Al Jazeera English. “We sent teams to join our Cairo bureau and made

sure that we were covered on the ground in other countries in the region so when the story unfolded we were ready to cover all angles.”

Al Jazeera’s powerful images of angry crowds and bloody morgues undercut the Egyptian regime’s self-serving arguments and stood in sharp contrast to the state-run TV channels, which promoted such a dishonest version of events that some of their journalists resigned in disgust. At least one popular TV talk-show presenter, Mahmoud Saad, was later seen being carried on the shoulders of triumphant demonstrators in Tahrir Square. While Al Jazeera was showing hundreds of thousands of people calling for the end of the regime, Egyptian TV showed humdrum scenes of traffic quietly passing by; when Al Jazeera reported hundreds of people queuing for bread and gas, Egyptian TV showed happy shoppers with full fridges using footage filmed at an unknown time in the past.

During the uprising in Cairo, the Egyptian government systematically targeted Al Jazeera in an attempt to impede the network’s gathering and broadcasting of news. On Jan. 27 Al Jazeera Mubasher, the network’s live channel, was dropped by the government-run satellite transmission company, Nilesat. On Jan. 30, outgoing Egyptian Information Minister Anas al-Fiqi ordered the offices of all Al Jazeera bureaus in Egypt to be shut down and the accreditation of all network journalists to be revoked. At the height of the protests, Nilesat broke its contractual agreement with the network and stopped transmitting the signal of Al Jazeera’s Arabic channel—which meant viewers outside Egypt could only follow the channel on satellites not controlled by the Egyptian authorities. To the rescue came at least 10 other Arabic-language TV stations, which stepped in and offered to carry Al Jazeera’s content. “They just volunteered,” said Souag. “They were not paid, and we thanked them for that.”

The next day, six Al Jazeera English journalists were briefly detained and then released, their camera equipment confiscated by the Egyptian military. On Feb. 3, two unnamed Al Jazeera English journalists were attacked by Mubarak supporters; three more were detained. On Feb. 4, Al Jazeera’s Cairo office was stormed and vandalized by pro-Mubarak supporters. Equipment was set on fire and the Cairo bureau chief and an Al Jazeera correspondent were arrested. Two days later, the Egyptian military detained another correspondent, Ayman Mohyeldin; he was released after nine hours in custody.

The Al Jazeera website was also under relentless cyberattack from the onset of the uprising.

“The regime did everything they could to make things difficult for us, but they did not succeed,” said Souag. “We still had the most comprehensive reporting of the events in Egypt.”

After the first few days of the uprising, the Egyptian state media began running an insidious propaganda campaign in an apparent effort to terrorize ordinary Egyptians into staying at home and off the streets. Channel 1 on Egypt state TV issued vague yet alarming warnings about armed thugs trying to infiltrate the protests and later broadcast live phone-ins in which members of the public complained about looting and disorder. It’s hard to think of a better way to incite panic in a jittery population, especially because there had been no emergency services in Egypt for days. By the time these garbled and unsubstantiated stories passed through the Egyptian rumor mill, ordinary people would be forgiven for thinking World War III had broken out. Egyptian state media also warned about international journalists with a “hidden agenda” and accused Al Jazeera of “inciting the people.” One supposed “foreign agent” was shown on Egyptian state TV with face obscured, claiming that she had been trained by “Americans and Israelis” in Qatar, where Al Jazeera is based.

But the lid on Pandora’s box has been prized open, and undemocratic regimes across the region are now looking over their shoulder at Al Jazeera—for history shows that where Egypt goes, other Arab countries soon follow. Given Al Jazeera’s enormous influence on the Arab street and its electrifying message that Arab dictatorships are, in fact, mortal, it is no wonder dictators and despots across the region have been left feeling rather rattled. There have already been hints of insurrection’s ripples in Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, and Bahrain. Could Al Jazeera threaten even Saudi Arabia?

Helping to bring revolution to Egypt and Tunisia is one thing; fomenting uprisings in the Persian Gulf is quite another. But the situation is delicate in Saudi Arabia, where the regime is wobbling on the cusp of change. The kingdom either directly or indirectly controls most of the Arab media, including Al Jazeera’s principal rival Al Arabiya, but it remains highly vulnerable to the kind of palpitations Al Jazeera could easily provoke.

And that’s where Al Jazeera’s home country of Qatar comes in. Qatar cer-

tainly has a tradition of political instability; its transitions have often come in the form of coups d'état, as in 1995 when the current emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, seized power from his father Sheikh Khalifa—but as the world's richest country with a GDP per capita in excess of \$145,000, it is highly unlikely to experience revolutionary convulsions about anything besides shopping. The most pressing socioeconomic problem the leadership currently faces is how to motivate a population of soon-to-be millionaires to keep showing up for work in the morning.

But bilateral relations between tiny Qatar and its overbearing neighbor Saudi Arabia have always been sensitive. Since 1996, when Al Jazeera first challenged Saudi hegemony in the region, the channel has been a constant point of tension between the two. For years, the Saudis dominated the Arabian Peninsula and often meddled in Qatari politics. On several occasions in the 1990s, the Saudis simply invaded Qatar to remind it who was boss and, following Sheikh Khalifa's ouster, Riyadh tried to manipulate his return by organizing a counter-coup.

But despite all the problems the Qataris have had with the Saudis, they are fully aware that if they upset the kingdom it is at their peril. As a result, coverage of Saudi affairs on Al Jazeera has not been as bold as coverage of Egypt and Tunisia. Issues of extreme sensitivity to the Saudi regime, such as royal family corruption and the succession question, are passed over lightly. Leading Saudi dissidents have rarely appeared on the network in recent years; there was, for example, next to no coverage on the Arabic channel of the 2010 murder in London committed by Saudi Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz bin Nasir al-Saud.

"Al Jazeera was absent from Saudi Arabia for a long time, so we don't have pictures or information from within the country," explained Souag. "Finally the Saudis allowed us to open an office about two weeks ago, and so we have a correspondent there now, and if there is something that needs to be covered we will report it in the same way as events anywhere else."

It's an issue of proximity and power. Despite the channel's exceptional job in covering the turmoil in Tunisia and Egypt, the complex relationship with Saudi Arabia is a reminder that even for Al Jazeera, in the Persian Gulf free press has its limits. History will record the channel's crucial galvanizing role in the extraordinary events that are now unfolding. But whether the

Al Jazeera effect will continue to ripple across the Middle East or the heavy hand of state pressure will attempt to shut Pandora's box again—however temporarily—is yet too close to call.

Hugh Miles is a freelance journalist and author of Al Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World and Playing Cards in Cairo.

CHAPTER 5

Barack Obama and the New Mideast



THE WHITE HOUSE, JUNE 4, 2010 (PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA/THE WHITE HOUSE)

“Look, Mubarak has been an ally of ours in a number of things and he’s been very responsible on, relative to geopolitical interests in the region: Middle East peace efforts, the actions Egypt has taken relative to normalizing the relationship with Israel. And I think that it would be—I would not refer to him as a dictator.”

— Vice President Joe Biden on PBS’s *NewsHour*, Jan. 27

“The Egyptian people have made it clear that there is no going back to the way things were: Egypt has changed, and its future is in the hands of the people.”

— President Barack Obama, Feb. 10

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2010, months before a streetcar vendor's *cri de coeur* lit the flame of revolution in Tunisia, U.S. President Barack Obama ordered a secret report on the potential for instability in the Arab world. What, he wanted to know, might push these regimes over the edge?

And yet, there were few signs that the Obama administration saw the Arab revolt coming. Not only did the State Department say little at high levels about the grossly rigged Egyptian parliamentary elections of November 2010, but U.S. officials continued to insist—against all evidence to the contrary—that quiet diplomacy was bearing fruit.

And once the first inklings of revolutionary fervor hit the streets of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, the United States was slow to realize what was happening. At a democracy conference in Doha, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton turned heads merely by pointing out the obvious: that Arab regimes were “sinking into the sand.” Still, it was not until Jan. 14, 2011—the day Tunisia's strong-man President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled to Jeddah—that President Obama issued a statement on the month-long uprising in Tunisia.

In Egypt, the Obama team may deserve credit for mostly getting out of the way of a process it was powerless to stop, but its comments betrayed confusion and internal division more than clear purpose. Throughout the crisis, the United States was slow to side fully with the protesters—beginning with Clinton's assessment that Egypt was “stable,” continuing through Vice President Joseph Biden's refusal to call Mubarak a “dictator” and the statements of Frank Wisner, the White House envoy—later disavowed—who said it was “crucial” that the Egyptian leader stay in power.

U.S. officials did consistently, and with increasing impatience, condemn

the use of force against protesters and urged the Egyptian military to do everything in its power to avoid bloodshed. But until it became obvious to all that Mubarak was going down, the United States looked as if it was still trying to thread the needle, balancing its strategic ties to the regime with its genuine desire to see the Egyptian people's aspirations fulfilled. In the end, those positions proved impossible to reconcile.

And now, as these essays document, the task may get harder yet, the balancing still more complicated for a White House that must once again put the Middle East at the center of its Situation Room map.

RIP, ENGAGEMENT

BY JAMES TRAUB

The Sept. 11, 2001, attacks prompted a radical rethinking inside the administration of President George W. Bush about the purposes of American foreign policy—above all in the Middle East. “Realism died on 9/11,” as an administration official told me several years later. Changing the insides of states had become a matter of national security no less urgent than affecting their external behavior. Bush, previously a hardheaded realist, became an ardent proponent of democracy promotion.

But the problem—or at least the biggest problem—was that while the terrorist attacks had changed the United States, they hadn’t changed the place where the United States hoped to act. Terrorism had made democratic reform more urgent without making it a whit more likely. Autocratic leaders in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere regarded the president’s new preoccupation as a mere irritant.

Now, suddenly, unexpectedly, it’s that world, not the United States, that’s changing. The Tunisian people took to the streets and ousted a tyrant, just as the people in the Philippines, Chile, Romania, and Georgia once did. And that spectacle inspired young people and activists across the region, from the next-to-fall regime in Egypt to those now tottering in Yemen and Bahrain, Algeria and elsewhere. Arab leaders are shakier today, and their critics more emboldened, than they were before. And Barack Obama, like Bush before him, must adapt to a Middle East different from the one he inherited.

A region that has felt paralyzed by autocratic rule is now in motion. Leaders are backpedaling. Even before the uprising that toppled his boss, you could almost smell the fear in the likes of Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Egypt’s

foreign minister, who informed the country's official press agency that "the talk about the spread of what happened in Tunisia to other countries is nonsense." And Egyptian leaders angrily pushed back against outside criticism. Aboul Gheit called on a group of Arab foreign ministers meeting in the resort town of Sharm-el-Sheikh to adopt a resolution telling the West: "Do not dare interfere in our affairs."

Aboul Gheit was reacting not only to criticism following the New Year's Day bombing of an Egyptian church, but to a speech his American counterpart, Hillary Clinton, had just delivered in Doha on Jan. 13, warning that people in many parts of the Arab world "have grown tired of corrupt institutions and a stagnant political order" and imploring states to demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law and the inclusion of civil society. One way of framing the choices facing Obama: Should he now be more willing, or less, to risk infuriating autocratic allies through public criticism?

Until now, U.S. officials, above all Clinton, have almost always chosen circumspection. And they've had at least a plausible rationale: Bush took a different approach and failed. In 2005, both Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice publicly criticized Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's regime and demanded that it hold free and fair elections. Mubarak first gave ground, and then cracked down on the opposition; the White House, fearful of offending a key ally and worried about the growing popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood, held its tongue. Obama discarded Bush's crusading moralism in favor of "engagement," which dictated a more respectful stance toward regimes.

Clinton has been the administration's most single-minded practitioner of engagement. When she emerged from a meeting with Aboul Gheit in Washington last November to brief the press, she decided to omit one subject they had discussed—human rights in Egypt. According to two Middle East experts, Aboul Gheit had been so offended by her private remarks that she decided to say nothing in public, though aides had included such remarks in her prepared text. (A State Department official would neither confirm nor deny the account.) Clinton has rarely criticized autocratic allies in public. Although Bahrain, home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, has recently jailed political opponents and shut down human rights organizations, Clinton has remained silent on the subject—as has the White House—and she

did not allude to this unpleasantness in the speech she gave in the Persian Gulf kingdom in December.

The truth is that, just as Bush's bluster didn't relax the iron grip of Arab regimes, neither has Obama's policy of engagement. The president asked Mubarak to lift Egypt's state of emergency and permit international observers to monitor the recent parliamentary election; Mubarak stiffed him on both counts. Taking engagement seriously has had the effect of demonstrating its limits as well as its virtues. It's time to try something else—or something more.

Was the Doha speech, then, a sign of new thinking? Tamara Cofman Wittes, the State Department's lead official for Middle East democracy promotion, insisted that it wasn't. "We've been watching these trends in the region for quite some time," she told me. But Clinton's language was in fact a sharp departure from the past, and my understanding is that the administration has been conducting a broad reassessment of human rights and democracy promotion policy in recent months, though not specifically with regard to the Middle East. Obama himself seems more willing to use the kind of moral vocabulary he once regarded with skepticism: Witness his public welcome in January to Chinese President Hu Jintao, which included a call for China to accept universal standards of human rights. Obama also made a point of meeting with five Chinese human rights activists and scholars the week before Hu's arrival.

China, of course, will not give much more than lip service to American calls for reform. But the lesson of Tunisia is that even in the Middle East, public fury can demolish apparently stable regimes—and do so in a moment. Some regimes, especially in the Persian Gulf, will be able to continue bribing restive citizens into submission; some may even retain legitimacy through good governance and economic mobility. But others will try to stare down their domestic and foreign critics as internal pressures rise higher and higher. What then?

The answer that some administration officials give—and this does, in fact, represent a new strain of thinking—is that they have begun to look beyond regimes in order to strengthen the hand of other actors. In this sense, Clinton's swing through the Arab world, which included meetings with local human rights and democracy activists, was itself the message, as much

as the speech itself: The administration has increasingly come to see the funding and public encouraging of civil society organizations as a “second track” of engagement in repressive regimes. I was told, in fact, that the harsh criticisms of regimes that Clinton heard in these sessions found their way into her speech.

This is all to the good. But how will the administration respond when regimes jail those activists or shut down their organizations? With silence, as in Bahrain? With private entreaties and public tact, as in Egypt? Or has the logic of engagement finally exhausted itself? Betting that Arab autocrats will stay in power and preserve American interests looks riskier than ever. How will the White House react if public outrage threatens Algiers, or Cairo? The time to start thinking about this question is now.

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THE NEW ARAB WORLD ORDER

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

The most telling aspect of the anti-regime demonstrations that have rocked the Arab world is what they are not about: They are not about the existential plight of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation; nor are they at least overtly anti-Western or even anti-American. The demonstrators have directed their ire against unemployment, tyranny, and the general lack of dignity and justice in their own societies. This constitutes a sea change in modern Middle Eastern history.

Of course, such was the course of demonstrations against the Shah of Iran in 1978 and 1979, before that revolution was hijacked by Islamists. But in none of these Arab countries is there a charismatic Islamic radical who is the oppositional focal point, like Ayatollah Khomeini was; nor are the various Islamist organizations in the Arab world as theoretical and ideological in their anti-Americanism as was the Shiite clergy. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt functions to a significant extent as a community self-help organization and may not necessarily try to hijack the uprising to the extent as happened in Iran. And even Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was not quite so identified with American interests as was the shah. The differences between 2011 in Egypt and 1978 in Iran are more profound than the similarities.

Whatever the outcome of these uprisings, it seems clear that Arabs and their new leaders will be focused for years to come on the imperfections within their own societies—perhaps to a greater degree than on injustices committed by Israel and the West abroad. Indeed, in Tunisia the demonstrations were partially spurred by the WikiLeaks cables that showed Washington deeply ambivalent about the regime and not likely to stand with it in a crisis. Politics may thus become normalized in the Arab world, rather than radicalized. Remember: A signal goal of al Qaeda was the toppling of such regimes as Mubarak's, which oppressed their own people and were seen as toadies to American and Israeli interests. With Mubarak gone, al Qaeda has lost a recruiting argument.

But the dangers to U.S. interests of what comes next in the Arab world are hard to exaggerate. Were demonstrations to spread in a big way to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, a catastrophe could be looming. A more enlightened, pro-American regime than the one now in Jordan is hard to imagine. As for the Saudi royal family, it is probably the worst possible form of government for that country except for any other that might credibly replace it. Imagine all that weaponry the United States has sold the Saudis over the decades falling into the hands of Wahhabi radicals. Imagine Yemen were it divided once again into northern and southern parts, or with even weaker central control issuing from the capital city of Sanaa. The United States would be virtually on its own battling al Qaeda there.

Right now all these uprisings look somewhat the same, as they did in Eastern Europe in 1989. But like in Eastern Europe, each country will end up a bit differently, with politics reflecting its particular constituency and state of institutional and educational development. Poland and Hungary had relatively easy paths to capitalism and democracy; Romania and Bulgaria were sunk in abject poverty for years; Albania suffered occasional bouts of anarchy; and Yugoslavia descended into civil war that killed hundreds of thousands of people. The Arab world is in some ways more diverse than Eastern Europe, and we should therefore heed the uniqueness of each country's political and historical situation in calibrating U.S. policy.

President Barack Obama's administration should stand up for first principles of civil society, nonviolence, and human rights everywhere; and where an autocrat appears on the way out, as happened in Tunisia and Egypt, the United States can play a constructive role in easing his removal, even as it reaches out to the new political forces at play. American diplomacy in the Arab world is about to become even more intricate. No longer will it be a matter of having one telephone number to call in each country. Henceforth, Washington will have to deal with dozens of political personalities to get the same things done as it used to with just one leader. Democracy equals complexity.

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WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD, MR. OBAMA

BY GARY SICK

The string of popular uprisings that has rocked the Arab world has created a fundamental dilemma for U.S. policy in the Middle East. Policymakers are being forced to place a bet on an outcome that is inherently unpredictable and pregnant with some unsavory consequences.

There is no shortage of talk about the conditions in these Arab countries that has given rise to the revolts. They have very young populations, poor economic performance, meager future prospects, a widening divide between the wealthy and the poor, and a culture of authoritarian arrogance from governments that have come to regard their position as a matter of entitlement. The line between monarchies and “republics” has become so blurred as to be meaningless. Family dynasties rule ... and rule and rule, seemingly forever.

Just about everyone agreed it had to change. But the masses appeared so passive, the governments so efficient at repression—the one job they did really well—that no one was willing to predict when or how change would happen.

Now that the status quo is shaking, there are expressions of amazement that the U.S. government made its bed with such dictatorial regimes for so long. It coddled them and gave them huge sums of money while averting its eyes from the more distasteful aspects of their rule. How to explain this hypocrisy?

The facts are not so mysterious. It was an Egyptian dictator (Anwar Sa-

dat) who made peace with Israel, leading to his assassination; and it was another dictator (Hosni Mubarak) who kept that peace, however cold, for the past 30 years. As part of that initial bargain and successive agreements, the United States has paid in excess of \$60 billion to the government of Egypt and an amount approaching \$100 billion to Israel. The investment may be huge, but since the Camp David agreement negotiated by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 there has been no new Arab-Israel war.

Some may quibble with the crude implication of a payoff or the collapsing of several generations of politics in the Middle East into this simple formula. But it has some validity. Here is how Vice President Joe Biden answered when PBS anchor Jim Lehrer asked him whether Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was a dictator:

“Look, Mubarak has been an ally of ours in a number of things and he’s been very responsible on, relative to geopolitical interests in the region: Middle East peace efforts, the actions Egypt has taken relative to normalizing the relationship with Israel.

“And I think that it would be—I would not refer to him as a dictator.”

Leslie Gelb, a former senior U.S. government official and president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, put it this way:

“The stakes are sky high. Egypt is the linchpin to peace in the Middle East. So long as Egypt refrains from warring against Israel, other Arab states cannot take military action by themselves.”

So in some minds, the issue is primarily about Israel. As far as I can tell, the government of Israel has yet to declare itself on the wave of uprisings in the Arab world. But if this is an Israeli issue, then it is not just a U.S. foreign-policy problem but also a domestic one, especially in the run-up to a presidential election year. The stakes, indeed, could be very high.

It is often forgotten, but there was a major Israeli dimension to the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution of as well. The Shah of Iran was Israel’s best friend in the Muslim world, an essential part of Israel’s doctrine of the periphery. Israel not only cultivated nations just outside the core Arab center, but in the case of Iran received a substantial portion of its energy supplies via covert oil deliveries to Eilat from the Persian Gulf. Israel and Iran also collaborated on joint development and testing of a ballistic missile system capable of delivering a nuclear warhead.

President Richard Nixon and his advisor Henry Kissinger formalized the U.S. relationship during a meeting with the shah in 1972. They asked him to serve as the protector of U.S. security interests in the Persian Gulf at a time when the British were withdrawing and the United States was tied down in Indochina. Not only was Iran (and specifically the shah) the linchpin of U.S. regional security, but the United States had no backup plan. So confident was everyone that the shah or his successor would maintain this highly personal relationship that there had been no effort to fashion a Plan B in the event of an unexpected catastrophe.

There is genuine irony in the fact that Carter, Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin were at Camp David, in meetings that set the terms for more than a generation of uneasy peace in the Middle East, on the same day that the shah's regime experienced what would eventually prove to be its death blow—the massacre of protesters at Jaleh Square in Tehran on Sept. 8, 1978.

There is no need to strain the analogy. Iran and Egypt were and are very different places, with very different political dynamics. But the fundamental nature of the decision that is required today by the United States is not very different from the dilemma faced by the Carter administration three decades ago. Should you back the regime to the hilt, in the conviction that a change of leadership would likely endanger your most precious security interests? Or should you side with the opposition—either because you agree with its goals or simply because you want to be on the “right side of history” (and in a better position to pursue your policy objectives) once the dust has settled?

Of course, there is a third way. You may try to carefully maintain your ties with the current ruler (see Biden above), while offering rhetorical support to freedom of expression, democracy, and human rights. Regrettably, as the Carter administration can attest, that may produce the worst of both worlds. If the ruler falls, he and his supporters will accuse you of being so lukewarm in your support that it was perceived as disavowal, whereas the opposition will dismiss your pious expressions as cynical and ineffectual.

Revolutions are inherently unpredictable. They may fizzle or subside in the face of sustained regime oppression. They may inspire a hard-line military man to “restore order” and perhaps thereby elevate himself into a

position of political authority that he is later loath to relinquish. They may propel a determined radical fringe into power and thereby impose an ideology that has nothing to do with what people thought they were fighting for. They may go on far longer than anyone imagined at the start.

But for engaged outside powers, such as the United States in the Egyptian situation, a major revolt calls for a leap into the unknown. If you sit back and wait, events may simply pass you by. But if you jump into the fray too early (or with a mistaken notion of what is actually going on) you may lose all influence in the future political construct, whatever that may be. In any event, you should start thinking about how to repair or rebuild a security structure that had been safely on autopilot for too long.

Welcome to the real world, Mr. Obama.

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BLOGGING EGYPT: MARC LYNCH ON OBAMA'S CHALLENGE

JANUARY 28

Like approximately 99 percent of the Arab world and the U.S. government, I've been glued to Al Jazeera all morning watching the astonishing images of mass demonstrations and brutal security force repression across Egypt. I'm not going to even try to summarize the course of events thus far—for now I just wanted to quickly note that the Obama administration needs to get out in front of this very, very soon. Its messaging has been good thus far, consistently and firmly been speaking out against Egyptian repression and in support of political freedoms. The message has been muddied by a few unfortunate exceptions such as Clinton's early comment about Egyptian stability, presumably before she had been fully briefed, and Biden's bizarre praise for Mubarak last night. Despite those false notes, it's been a strong message ... but one that is rapidly being overtaken by events.

This is about more than Egypt—it touches the United States' entire position in the region. After weak early coverage, Al Jazeera has more than risen to the occasion today with graphic, riveting coverage of the fateful day. Al Jazeera and a few other media outlets have compensated for the Egyptian government's remarkable shutdown of virtually the entire Internet and mobile-phone networks and have thwarted the regime's effort to impose an information blackout allowing its brutal methods to go unwitnessed. Al Jazeera has reclaimed ownership of a narrative that has long

been the core of its DNA.

It will be a long time before anyone in the region forgets some of the scenes that aired today. And it will be a long time before anyone forgets what position the United States took on today's events—whether it lived up to its rhetoric on Arab democracy, or whether it silently accedes to brutal repression by a friendly dictator. The administration needs to be careful, more so than analysts like me, but there's no hiding from this now.

That said, the arguments for caution are crumbling rapidly.

More broadly the costs to the Obama administration with Arab public opinion of being on the wrong side of this issue will be enormous. This isn't about the “magical democracy words” of the past few years—it's about a moment of flux when real change is possible, whether or not the United States wants it. Accepting Mubarak's fierce gambit now would put an end to any claim the United States has of promoting democracy and reform for a generation, and alienating the rising youth generation on which the administration has placed so much emphasis. It would also make Cairo the graveyard of Obama's Cairo speech and efforts to rebuild relations with the Muslims of the world. The United States will be better positioned to push such changes in the right direction if it maintains a strong and principled position today—regardless of whether Mubarak or someone else ends up in control. The cautious strategy right now is the same as the principled one, whether Mubarak falls or survives.

JANUARY 29

After President Obama spoke last night about the situation in Egypt, my Twitter feed and inbox filled up with angry denunciations, with lots of people complaining bitterly that he had endorsed Mubarak's grim struggle to hold on to power, missed a historic opportunity, and risked sparking a wave of anti-Americanism. Once I actually read the transcript of his remarks, though, I felt much better.

It's crucial to understand that the United States is not the key driver of the Egyptian protest movement. They do not need or want American leadership—and they most certainly are not interested in “vindicating” Bush's freedom agenda or the Iraq war, an idea which almost all would find some-

where between laughable, bewildering, and deeply offensive. Suspicion of American intentions runs deep, as does folk wisdom about decades of U.S. collaboration with Mubarak. They are not really parsing Hillary Clinton's adjectives. Their protest has a dynamic and energy of its own, and while they certainly want Obama to take their side forcefully and unequivocally, they don't need it.

What they do need, if they think about it, is for Obama to help broker an endgame from the top down—to impose restraints on the Egyptian military's use of violence to repress protests, to force it to get the Internet and mobile phones back online, to convince the military and others within the regime's inner circle to ease Mubarak out of power, and to try to ensure that whatever replaces Mubarak commits to a rapid and smooth transition to civilian, democratic rule. And that's what the administration is doing. The administration's public statements and private actions have to be understood as not only offering moral and rhetorical support to the protesters, or as throwing bones to the Washington echo chamber, but as working pragmatically to deliver a positive ending to a still extremely tense and fluid situation.

I completely understand why activists and those who desperately want the protesters to succeed would be frustrated—anything short of Obama gripping the podium and shouting “Down With Mubarak!” probably would have disappointed them. But that wasn't going to happen, and shouldn't have. If Obama had abandoned a major ally of the United States such as Hosni Mubarak without even making a phone call, it would have been irresponsible and would have sent a very dangerous message to every other U.S. ally. That doesn't mean, as some would have it, that Obama has to stick with Mubarak over the long term—or even the weekend—but he simply had to make a show of trying to give a long-term ally one last chance to change.

The key line in his remarks here is this: “When President Mubarak addressed the Egyptian people tonight, he pledged a better democracy and greater economic opportunity. I just spoke to him after his speech and I told him he has a responsibility to give meaning to those words, to take concrete steps and actions that deliver on that promise.”

This is not the language of capitulation to Mubarak's empty promises of reform. It's a pretty sharp challenge to him to demonstrate serious change immediately, which in no way commits to backing Mubarak if he fails to

do so. And comments made by various administration officials suggest that they don't really expect him to be able to deliver. This blunt conditionality has to be understood in tandem with White House spokesman Robert Gibbs's carefully chosen words that U.S. economic and military aid to Egypt would now be reviewed—a direct, almost unprecedented form of pressure on Egypt for which many democracy activists have clamored for years to no avail.

FEBRUARY 3

The Obama administration has been trying increasingly forcefully to persuade Hosni Mubarak to allow an “orderly transition” that is “meaningful.” The administration has sent this message privately through multiple channels and has gradually escalated its public statements up to the president's statement on Tuesday that the transition must be meaningful and must begin now. Yesterday's frenzy of regime-orchestrated mob violence shows clearly that Mubarak is not interested in following this advice and like so many dictators before him intends to cling to power by any means necessary. By unleashing violence and refusing the demand for an immediate, meaningful transition, Mubarak has now violated two clear red lines laid down by the president. There must be consequences. It's time to meet escalation with escalation and lay out, in private and public, that the Egyptian military now faces a clear and painful choice: push Mubarak out now and begin a meaningful transition, or else face international isolation and a major rupture with the United States.

Mubarak's actions should not have come as a surprise. His strategy was obvious from the start: to try to buy time until the protest fever broke by offering a variety of token concessions, seeking to divide the opposition by co-opting political party leaders, playing on Western fears of Islamists, stoking nationalist resentments against foreign interference, carefully protecting his relations with the military leadership, and cashing in on decades of good relations with international leaders. His strategy thus far has been only partly successful—the regime has clearly been surprised by the energy and tenacity of the protesters, as well as by how little international support he has found. Indeed, while many people have argued that Mubarak's unleash-

ing of the thugs against the protesters in Tahrir Square came with Obama's blessing, I'd say it was quite the opposite—an act of desperation when Obama privately and publicly rejected his “concessions” as inadequate.

What now? I would say that the time has come for the Obama administration to escalate to the next step of actively trying to push Mubarak out. They were right to not do so earlier. No matter how frustrated activists have been by his perceived hedging, until yesterday it was not the time to move to the bottom line. Mubarak is an American ally of 30 years and needed to be given the chance to respond appropriately. And everyone seems to forget that magical democracy words (a phrase which as far as I know I coined) don't work. Obama saying “Mubarak must go” would not have made Mubarak go, absent the careful preparation of the ground so that the potential power brokers saw that they really had no choice. Yesterday's orgy of state-sanctioned violence should be the moment to make clear that there is now no alternative.

FEBRUARY 8

There seems to be a congealing narrative that the Obama administration has thrown in its lot with Omar Suleiman, abandoned its push for democratic change, and succumbed to shortsighted pragmatism. It's easy to see the attraction of this perspective. Hopes and expectations that Friday would be the climactic day of Mubarak's departure shattered on his obstinate refusal, leaving many people deflated and frustrated. Comments by the State Department's mail-carrier Frank Wisner that Mubarak should stay and more cautious language from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Munich are dots easily connected, especially by a Washington media corps primed for signs of Obama's weakness or intra-administration splits. Suleiman and Mubarak's men are also pushing this narrative of a softening American position in order to deflect perceptions that they are under foreign pressure and to discourage Egyptian protesters. Tahrir Square protesters have been primed from the start to express their dismay with Obama, since he could never have satisfied their hopes.

But this narrative, so politically convenient for so many different actors, captures only one part of the truth. But at this point, the hard reality

is that we may not get the cathartic moment of Mubarak's plane departing to the cheers of millions of Egyptians celebrating a new era. The struggle is now shifting to the much messier terrain of negotiations over the terms of Egypt's transition, with public and private jockeying over matters ranging from the esoteric (proposed language for constitutional reforms) to the symbolic (Mubarak's role).

Overall, we should not overreact to the frustration over Mubarak's hanging on to power and the seeming retrenchment of regime power. Let's not forget how much has already happened—Hosni and Gamal Mubarak agreeing not to run in the next election, in particular, meaning that the Kifaya movement has finally achieved its primary demand dating back nearly a decade. The administration, for its part, has continued to push hard publicly and privately for rapid, meaningful reforms. The narrative that it has abandoned them is untrue, but could become a self-fulfilling prophecy if it empowers Suleiman's "normality" gambit and stiffens the regime's resistance to real change. There are many tough days ahead and no guarantees that the administration's strategy will work. But it is still trying.

FEBRUARY 10

It's hard to exaggerate how bad Hosni Mubarak's speech today was for Egypt. In the extended run-up to his remarks, every sign indicated that he planned to announce his resignation: the military's announcement that it had taken control, the shift in state television coverage, a steady stream of leaks about the speech. With the whole world watching, Mubarak instead offered a meandering, confused speech promising vague constitutional changes and defiance of foreign pressure. He offered a vaguely worded delegation of power to Vice President Omar Suleiman, long after everyone in Egypt had stopped listening. It is virtually impossible to conceive of a more poorly conceived or executed speech.

It seems pretty clear that most people, from the Obama administration to Egyptian government and opposition leaders, expected Mubarak to announce his departure tonight—and that they had good reasons to believe that. That turned out to be wrong. I don't think anybody knows what's going on inside Mubarak's head right now, though he certainly seems out of

touch with what is really going on. I suspect that his decision may have changed from earlier in the day and that people inside the Egyptian military and regime are themselves scrambling to figure out their next move. If the military has any plans to step in this would be a good time—especially after the military's communiqué #1 seemed to suggest that it was breaking in the other direction.

Obama doesn't have a lot of great options right now. His policy of steadily mounting private and public pressure to force Mubarak to leave and for his successor to begin a meaningful transition to real democratic change seems to have almost worked. But for now it seems to have foundered on Mubarak's obstinateness. The administration, which is conferring even as I wrote this, can't be silent in the face of Mubarak and Suleiman's disastrous decision. It needs to continue to pound on its message that it demands that a real transition begin immediately, and to do whatever it can to make that happen now ... even if its leverage remains limited. It should express its sharp disappointment with what it heard today and continue to push the military to avoid using violence in the tense hours to come. Mubarak's speech today, with its frequent references to foreign pressure, poses a direct challenge to Obama (and also suggests how much pressure he was in fact receiving). Those who are suggesting that Obama wanted Mubarak to stay are nuts. Now it's time to double down on the push for an orderly transition to real democracy before it's too late—and that is now.

FEBRUARY 11

It's frankly hard to believe today's news that Hosni Mubarak has finally stepped down as president of Egypt without a wave of bloodshed. After yesterday's disappointment and today's anxiety, nothing could have been more welcome. There will be plenty of time for postmortems, and there will be an enormous amount of hard work to come to ensure that this actually becomes a transition to democracy and not simply to a reconstituted authoritarian regime. But for today, it's OK to simply celebrate—to stand in awe of the Egyptian people and their ability to topple a seemingly impenetrable dictator through massive, peaceful protests. Nothing will ever be the same. This was an unprecedented victory for the Egyptian people and at last a

vindication of the Obama administration's patient and well-crafted strategy.

There is no question that the first, second, and third drivers of this Egyptian revolution were the Egyptian people. The creativity of the youth and their ability to mobilize a wide range of Egyptian society around a common demand against daunting odds are simply an inspiration. The fact that these massive crowds avoided violence under incredibly tense conditions and under great uncertainty speaks volumes. This did not come out of nowhere—Egyptian activists have been mobilizing for change for a decade, with the Kifaya movement deserving enormous credit for breaking the walls of silence and fear and bringing opposition to the Mubarak regime out into the public sphere. But their success in the face of the power of a strong authoritarian regime was a surprise to everyone—including to them. And in the analyses to come, Al Jazeera's role will require a chapter of its own.

The Obama administration also deserves a great deal of credit, which it probably won't receive. It understood immediately and intuitively that it should not attempt to lead a protest movement which had mobilized itself without American guidance, and consistently deferred to the Egyptian people. Despite the avalanche of criticism from protesters and pundits, in fact Obama and his key aides—including Ben Rhodes and Samantha Power and many others—backed the Egyptian protest movement far more quickly than anyone should have expected. Their steadily mounting pressure on the Mubarak regime took time to succeed, causing enormous heartburn along the way, but now can claim vindication. By working carefully and closely with the Egyptian military, it helped restrain the worst violence and prevent Tiananmen on Tahrir—which, it is easy to forget today, could very easily have happened. No bombs, no shock and awe, no soaring declarations of American exceptionalism, and no taking credit for a tidal wave which was entirely of the making of the Egyptian people—just the steadily mounting public and private pressure on the top of the regime which was necessary for the protesters to succeed.

By the way, for those keeping score in the “peacefully removing Arab dictators” game, it's now Obama 2, Bush 0. The administration has been subjected to an enormous amount of criticism over the last two weeks for its handling of Egypt, including by people inspired by or who worked on the previous administration's Freedom Agenda. It was also attacked sharply

from the left, by activists and academics who assumed that the administration was supporting Mubarak and didn't want democratic change. In the end, Obama's strategy worked. Perhaps this should earn it some praise, and even some benefit of the doubt going forward. And now, a day to celebrate before rolling up the sleeves for the hard work to come.

RETURNING FREEDOM TO THE AGENDA

BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

It's time to bury the unreal, failed "realism" of those who have long thought that dictators brought stability. What we have seen is that the stability they bring—for years or even decades—carries with it a curse. For when they go, they leave behind a civic culture that has been drastically weakened and moderate parties that are disorganized, impoverished, and without recognizable leaders. For 30 years, President Hosni Mubarak told us to stick with him, or the opposition Muslim Brotherhood would grow stronger. Well, we stuck with him—and the Muslim Brotherhood grew stronger. As he crushed the political center and left, the Brotherhood became the main forum for opposition to his regime.

Of course it doesn't have to be this way, in theory: Dictators can theoretically oversee a slow but steady expansion of political space and leave behind a stable democracy. But they don't. Enlightened despots are mythical creatures; real despots seem more interested in stealing money or installing their sons after them.

This crisis should also have put paid to another shibboleth: that everything in the region revolves around the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. What we are witnessing from Tunisia to Egypt to Yemen and beyond has nothing to do with Israel or the Palestinians. Nor would resolving that conflict have satisfied those who have demonstrated against Tunisia's Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali or Mubarak or Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh, for protesters' demands were focused on their own countries.

U.S. policy should move toward backing freedom, using the full force of American influence against regimes like those in Syria and Iran, and assisting in every practical way possible the efforts in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere, to build democratic parties, protect human rights, and move toward stable democratic politics.

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THE RIGHT WAY TO ENGAGE

BY ZALMAY KHALILZAD

From personal experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, I have seen that the United States is often unwilling to take steps needed to create a level political playing field between democratic forces that have substantial potential support but lack funding and non-democratic forces that receive such support from countries like Iran.

To date, the debate about events in Egypt centers on whether these are dangerous or hopeful. Yet this question can only be judged in retrospect, after the post-Mubarak transition either succeeds or fails to produce a better order, and it will depend, in part, on how its most volatile moments are managed.

The situation at present is highly volatile, and we have an opportunity to assist in shaping the future by encouraging the inclusion of appropriate steps and structures. Western and especially U.S. policymakers should therefore focus on how to engineer the right kind of transition.

This will not be easy, particularly because the opposition is diffuse and lacks clear leaders; they are likely to differ on key issues beyond Mubarak's immediate departure. Yet actions by United States and its democratic allies in Europe can be important in producing the kind of outcome that will serve the interests of the Egyptian people by building toward a democratic order.

The crisis in Egypt—and its reverberations throughout the Middle East—signals that the United States and European democracies must become more engaged in the region, supporting reform and establishing a foundation for a democratic order. As a first step, we need to engage our

friends, such as Jordan and other countries, and assist them in developing and implementing a plan for reforms that can preclude the type of crisis happening in Egypt.

More broadly, we need to support civil society and new media throughout the region—in both friendly and hostile countries. The region's political, economic, and social systems are failing to cope with the demands of modernity, and these dysfunctions are producing political turbulence and threats that the wider world cannot ignore. The United States and its European allies should partner with positive political forces in these countries to work toward the transformation of the region, opening up political and economic systems while ensuring that constructive politics rather than violence shape the future.

This will require patience and commitment, but encouraging the Middle East's evolution into a stable and normal region is imperative not only for the people of the region but for our own security and the security of our friends and allies.

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POLICY FIT FOR A BUMPER STICKER

BY STEPHEN SESTANOVICH

These days, all opinions, commentaries, and bold assertions about American foreign policy should come with a disclaimer: “What I am about to say could look awfully foolish by tomorrow morning.” With this understood, three changes in the way the Obama administration approaches the Middle East seem likely to me. (And one of them has to do with the analytical and operational timidity that takes hold when people become too worried about being embarrassed by fast-moving events.)

First, the Egyptian crisis cements the primacy of the greater Middle East in American foreign policy as a whole. Perhaps some people thought that Barack Obama’s administration, after skillfully closing out its inherited involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan, could then turn to dealing with larger problems of the global future, like the rise of China, nuclear proliferation, or climate change? Well, forget that. The immediate stakes for Washington—including even for Obama’s political standing at home—will not seem of comparable significance anywhere outside the Middle East. Obama will regularly face this challenging question: How well are you dealing with new realities in the region? (Remember, although the end of the Cold War was expected to make Eastern Europe less important, people judged Bill Clinton’s foreign-policy performance by his handling of the Balkans and NATO enlargement.) Iraq and Afghanistan will be factored into the evaluation. After Egypt, it will be even harder for the president to walk away from Afghanistan with an unsatisfactory outcome.

Second, Egypt’s fate—whatever it is—will make the domestic evolution of all states in the region the prime concern of American policy. War and

counterterrorism efforts, important as they are, will move to second place. Whatever problem Washington policymakers consider, and whatever measures they devise for addressing it, they will now ask themselves: What effect will this have on the likelihood that very bad guys will take over in Cairo? (And, of course, Amman, Riyadh, and Sanaa.) Some major policy initiatives will be pushed through because they are expected to help prop up the good guys. Others will be ruled out because of fears that they will make it harder to achieve some sort of semi-democratic stability.

Finally, political earthquakes like the Cairo events always produce calls for major rethinking: grand strategy, high concept, neo-Kennanism. Obama will not be the first president to tell his staff he wants a memorable formula—a profound bumper sticker—to describe his new approach. This is understandable—and, even more, correct. But the results are usually slow in coming and often unsatisfactory when they arrive. Meanwhile, the need for a long-term view will never trump the demand for daily pulse-taking. Dean Acheson used to disparage his critics by comparing them to the farmer who pulled up his seedlings every evening to see how successfully they were taking root. It was a good line, but it did not really describe the success of American policy in the early Cold War. Acheson did not simply plant the right seeds and wait patiently for the harvest. Nor did Henry Kissinger or George Shultz. Effective policy always has in it more experimentation, improvisation, even process of elimination, than its authors like to admit. If a year from now, the Obama administration has not run through at least three or four new ways of thinking about its problems in the Middle East, I'll be very surprised.

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CAIRO WASN'T OBAMA'S TO LOSE

BY AARON DAVID MILLER

If we're lucky this time around, we'll avoid the who-lost-Egypt debate. Hosni Mubarak's decision to step down has pre-empted a catastrophic crisis for Egypt and for American interests. We may not be adept at manipulating Middle Eastern politics; but we're sure experts at beating ourselves up.

Commentators and analysts have argued forcefully that Barack Obama's administration failed to anticipate the current crisis, blew an opportunity by failing to push Mubarak to make significant reforms during the early days of the upheaval, and risked being on the wrong side of history by not being assertive in trying to force Mubarak's removal. But the administration was smart to keep its distance from this crisis.

If the last eight years in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran—and the previous 800 years in the Middle East—demonstrate anything, it is that great powers cannot micromanage the affairs of small tribes. And when they try, they almost always fare badly.

There is much to quibble with in the administration's approach—too many daily political weather reports about the current situation in Cairo, not enough initial coordination about what the administration should say, and too many presidential statements.

But on balance, the administration has played a bad hand pretty well. The cards the president were dealt were largely beyond his control. Hammering him now completely ignores the reality that U.S. policy made its bed in Egypt decades ago, and now the administration—forced to sleep in it as it confronts the current crisis—has few good options.

For decades, the United States cut a devil's bargain with a number of Mid-

dle Eastern authoritarian regimes. And let's be clear here, Hosni Mubarak isn't Saddam Hussein: He's not a sociopath or a mass murderer. Indeed, until last month, I guarantee you, any number of U.S. officials, including the president and the secretary of state, chummed it up with him in Washington and Cairo.

The bargain the United States cut was quite simple: In exchange for helping it carry out what it believed to be sound American policies on peace and war, it gave Mubarak, the monarchs of Jordan, the Saudis, and even Saddam Hussein (for a brief period during the 1980s) a pass on domestic governance.

The United States issued annual human rights reports for these countries, which documented all kinds of abuses; Congress complained from time to time; and for a brief period under George W. Bush's second administration the country actually took freedom and human rights more seriously. But in the end, the basic bargain endured. That bargain didn't secure peace, stability, or security—just look around the neighborhood. But it did help manage a broken, dysfunctional, and angry region in which America had interests.

Did it prove shortsighted? Sure. But could a better bargain have been struck, given the mindsets of U.S. policymakers dealing first with the Cold War and then with the hot wars after 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq, and against al Qaeda when America really needed the support of authoritarian Arab regimes? I doubt it.

Bush took his freedom agenda seriously. But he never had the leverage, nor frankly the will, to force real change—in large part because he needed Arab support for the war against terror and in Iraq.

And the contract with the Arab world's dictators was a bipartisan one. When I worked at the State Department and would travel with secretaries James Baker, Warren Christopher, and Madeleine Albright, we always stopped in Cairo first to consult with Mubarak and, frankly, to enjoy his company. We looked at him as a friend.

We need to get a grip and realize one thing: The United States may not be a potted plant, but it does not and never has controlled the world. There is ample and public evidence of this, from America's struggle to emerge from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to its failure so far to stop the Iranian mullahcracy from repressing its own people, let alone acquiring a nuclear

weapon. In June 2009, when the Green Movement was fighting for its life in the streets of Tehran, the Obama administration didn't call on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to step down or surrender power. Indeed, it left ample room to allow for possible engagement with him.

America's record in directing the internal affairs of other countries isn't great. Yes, it rebuilt Europe and Japan in the post-World War II period and played a key role in the Balkans. And Iraq is a much improved place. But the story there is not over, and the price the United States paid was a terrible one.

Surrounded by nonpredatory neighbors to its north and south, and fish to its east and west, America has never really understood the rest of the world, nor the existential and political realities that small powers are forced to confront.

Had Obama tried to hammer Mubarak to reform Egypt's political system after his 2009 speech in Cairo, he would have had no more success than his predecessor. The devil's bargain would have assured that. The Egyptians have driven their own freedom express. Indeed, from the opposition's standpoint, the United States seemed almost irrelevant to the story.

The devil's bargain haunts America still. The country's limited policy options reflected that fact and created a terrible conundrum for the administration. It clearly wanted Mubarak gone but wouldn't say so explicitly out of fear of being accused of personalizing its policy, emboldening the opposition and risking a bloody confrontation with the regime, and alienating other Arab autocrats and Israel.

The United States may have been tempted to cut or withhold military assistance, particularly if there had been massive violence, but it really didn't want to do that, either, out of fear of losing influence with the military—the one constituency with which it will have to deal in the post-Mubarak Egypt. And America wanted to support the opposition—as the president's strong statement Thursday, Feb. 10, did; but it alienated them too because it couldn't or wouldn't meet their demands for Mubarak's ouster.

And so the White House waited, watched, danced, and shuffled—and probably talked too much.

But such are the travails of a great power having to live in the bed that it has made. And the story of contradictions in U.S. policy and America's

conundrums are far from over. The real challenge the United States will face in the post-Mubarak era is that Egypt has been, and is now still, a praetorian state where the military holds tremendous power. And the United States has an interest in maintaining close ties with that military as well as encouraging political reform. Therein lies the next conundrum. With great apologies to W.B. Yeats: I wonder what new bargain slouches toward Bethlehem, waiting to be born?

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CHAPTER 6

Now What? Revolution and Its Discontents



CAIRO, FEB. 6, 2011 (PHOTO BY JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES)

“At the end of 2011, Mohamed ElBaradei may well be president of a democratic Egypt. But then, at the end of 1789, Louis XVI was still King of France.”

—David A. Bell, “The End of the Beginning”

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab revolutions are far from over—including those that have already toppled dictators. The mood on the streets is exuberant as a stagnant political order gives way to the first stirrings of liberty and freedom. Yet only two Arab autocrats, Tunisia's Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, have fallen, and the corrupt systems they left behind have not been completely dismantled. Far nastier regimes, with fewer ties to the West, are determined to avoid the same fate. They will be far less reticent to employ deadly force. And by crushing legitimate democratic yearnings, tyrants may be birthing yet more extreme movements in the future.

Then there is the vexing question of just what kinds of governments will replace those regimes that do fall. Will long-suppressed Islamist movements sweep free and fair elections, as many fear? Will labor strikes and other forms of instability make economic recovery impossible, discrediting democracy in the process? And will new strongmen emerge, promising to restore order amid the chaos?

Something in the Arab world had to change. But as the recent “color revolutions” in Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, and Ukraine painfully show, street uprisings do not always turn out well. In a cautionary note on Egypt that could easily apply to the entire region, historian David A. Bell warns, “[I]f Mubarak is replaced by a weak, unstable series of governments that cannot restore order or deliver serious social and economic reforms—and thus quickly lose credibility and legitimacy among the population—then a different, far more radical revolutionary movement may yet develop.”

WINNERS, LOSERS, AND THE STILL UNKNOWNNS

BY STEPHEN M. WALT

When Zhou Enlai was asked in the 1970s about the historical significance of the French Revolution, he famously responded that it was “too soon to tell.” Given that wise caution, it is undoubtedly foolhardy for me to try to pick the winners and losers of an upheaval whose ultimate implications remain uncertain. But at the risk of looking silly in a few days (or weeks or months or years), I’m going to ignore the obvious pitfalls and forge ahead. Here’s my current list of winners and losers, plus a third category: those for whom I have no idea.

THE WINNERS

1. The Demonstrators: The obvious winners are the thousands of ordinary Egyptians who poured into the streets to demand Hosni Mubarak’s ouster and insist on the credible prospect of genuine reform. For this reason, Mubarak’s designated deputy, Omar Suleiman, had to go too. Some of the demonstrators’ activities were planned and coordinated (and we’ll probably know a lot more about it over time), but a lot of it was the spontaneous expression of long-simmering frustration. By relying on nonviolent methods, maintaining morale and discipline, and insisting that Mubarak had to go, the anti-government uprising succeeded where prior protest campaigns had failed. “People power” with an Arab face. And, oh yes: Google got a great product placement too.

2. Al Jazeera: With round-the-clock coverage that put a lot of Western media to shame, Al Jazeera comes out with its reputation enhanced. Its ability to transmit these images throughout the Arab world may have given events in Tunisia and Egypt far greater regional resonance. If Radio Cairo was the great revolutionary amplifier of the Nasser era, Al Jazeera may have emerged as an even more potent revolutionary force, as a medium that is shared by Arab publics and accessible to outsiders too. And I'll bet that is what Mubarak now thinks.

3. Democratic reformers elsewhere in the Middle East: Authoritarian governments in several other countries moved quickly after the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia to take concrete steps to try to defuse potential upheavals and accommodate some reformist demands. It's early days, of course, but democratic reformers throughout the region have the wind at their backs. Which goes to show that those who supported nonmilitary efforts to encourage more participatory forms of government were right (and those who sought to spread democracy at the end of a rifle barrel were not).

4. The Egyptian military: Paradoxically, the Egyptian armed forces emerged from the crisis with their political power enhanced even further. The United States is now betting that the Army will oversee a peaceful transition, and the early statements from military authorities are reassuring. The big question: Will the military commit itself to genuine reform, or will it try to safeguard its own prerogatives and privileges in a post-Mubarak Egypt?

5. China: Why is Beijing a winner here? Simple. Whatever subsequently happens in Egypt, the U.S. government is going to spend a lot of time and attention to trying to manage its local and regional impact. That's good news for China because it means Washington will have less time to spend on both its relations with Beijing and its other strategic partnerships in Asia. I suspect Chinese officials would dearly love for the United States to remain preoccupied by events in the Middle East, and the upheaval in Egypt makes that much more likely. But this advantage is not without an obvious downside: Given its own concerns for domestic legitimacy and internal stability, the Chinese Communist Party leadership cannot be too happy to see an

authoritarian leader swept from power by a popular uprising, even if the country in question is far away and very different.

THE LOSERS

1. The Mubarak Family: Well, duh. Not only is Hosni Mubarak likely to be denied the sort of legacy that he undoubtedly thought he deserved, but his son Gamal is badly in need of a good career counselor. And there's the growing possibility that Egypt's new leaders might start trying to track down the Mubarak's family's wealth, which is estimated to be on the order of \$2 billion to \$3 billion. I won't be weeping for any of them, but there can be no doubt that they are the biggest losers.

2. Al Qaeda: One of al Qaeda's standard talking points is its insistence that terrorist violence is the only way to bring about change in the Arab world. It also likes to rail against U.S. support for authoritarian regimes in the Islamic world. By driving Mubarak from office through largely peaceful demonstrations, the Egyptian people have demolished the first claim. And despite some occasional wobbles, Barack Obama's administration ultimately came down on the side of the demonstrators. By helping nudge Mubarak from power and declaring its general support for the reform movement, the Obama administration has undercut al Qaeda's second line of argument too. And in the best case—a genuine democratic reform movement that leads to significant improvements in Egyptian society—al Qaeda's appeal will be reduced even further. All in all, this was not a good month for Osama bin Laden, wherever he is.

3. The “Pax Americana” in the Middle East: The Obama administration's measured response to these events cannot disguise the fact that one of the key pillars of the past four decades of Washington's Middle East policy has crumbled. Despite some encouraging early signs, it is not yet clear how a post-Mubarak government will deal with Israel, the Gaza siege, extraordinary rendition, etc. A more representative Egyptian government is virtually certain to be less subservient than the old regime, which means that U.S.

diplomacy toward Egypt and the region will have to be more flexible and nuanced than it has been for some time. More than ever before, the United States will want to put Middle East policymaking in the hands of people who are imaginative, principled, evenhanded, deeply knowledgeable about Arab societies, and willing to rethink the failed policies of the past. Do I think we will? No.

4. The Muslim Brotherhood: Despite all the attention the Muslim Brotherhood has recently received, I think it's more than likely that Mubarak's departure will ultimately undercut its position in Egypt. It got 20 percent of the vote in the 2005 elections, but that total was inflated by the fact that it was the only real alternative to Mubarak's party. Once you let other political parties form and compete for popularity, electoral support for the MB is likely to decline, unless it can repackage itself in a way that appeals to younger Egyptians. Ironically, both Mubarak and the MB may be more a part of Egypt's past than an influential part of its future.

5. The Palestinians: In the short term, the Egyptian upheaval is bad news for the Palestinians. Why? Because other countries will pay even less attention to their plight than they usually do. Israel will be even less interested in the sort of concessions that could bring an end to the conflict—though a good case can be made that it should seize this opportunity to chart a new course—and the United States will be even less likely to put real pressure on them to do so.

In the long term, Mubarak's departure may be beneficial, however, especially if the new government takes a more active stance against the occupation. And if the Palestinian Authority uses the Egyptian example as an occasion to reconcile with Hamas and hold new elections, we might even see a more legitimate Palestinian national movement emerge as well. But don't hold your breath.

TO SOON TO TELL

1. Arab Authoritarians: If I were an Arab monarch or a dictator like

Bashar Assad of Syria, I certainly wouldn't be happy about what I've been watching in Cairo and other Middle Eastern capitals. But in the short term, their futures depend both on how matters evolve in Egypt and on how the remaining authoritarians respond to the Tunisian and Egyptian examples. If conditions subsequently deteriorate in Egypt or if the revolution gets hijacked by incompetent, corrupt, or extremist forces, then other Arab populations may be less inclined to follow suit. And the rest depends on how skillfully the current rulers can appease, deflect, or adapt to a new environment. You can hardly call them winners, of course, but it's not yet certain just how much they may have lost.

2. Israel: It's hardly surprising that many Israelis were alarmed by Mubarak's departure, because he collaborated with them on a number of matters and never did more than complain verbally about the Palestinian issue. But as I noted last week, his ouster could also be a wake-up call: reminding Israelis that the regional environment is subtly shifting against them, that military superiority is no guarantee against civil unrest and global opprobrium, and that a fair deal with the Palestinians is the best way to secure their long-term future. It might even be a genuine opportunity. In short, whether Israel wins or loses from this episode depends in part on how Israel chooses to respond to it.

3. President Barack Obama: The administration has walked a rather narrow tightrope since events began unfolding in January—not always very skillfully—seeking an outcome neither “too hot” (widespread violence, extremists in power, etc.) nor “too cold” (stability without reform). If these extremes are avoided, Obama and his team will deserve (and probably receive) kudos from most fair-minded observers, and his “no drama” approach to foreign policy will get some much-needed vindication. But if that Goldilocks “just right” outcome isn't sustained, he'll face a firestorm of criticism either for “losing Egypt” or for turning a deaf ear to demands for justice and democracy. Such accusations won't be entirely fair, insofar as no president can control events in a faraway country of 85 million people. But who ever said that political discourse in the United States was fair?

So that's my list. But here's the obvious caution: International affairs have

a way of producing sudden and unexpected reversals of fortune. Some of today's winners might look like losers tomorrow, and vice versa. And that goes for bloggers too.

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REVOLUTIONARY TRIUMPH? MAYBE.

BY NATHAN J. BROWN

Will the Egyptian “revolution,” as it is now universally called, live up to its name? That is not yet clear. I do see real reasons for hope—perhaps more than any time in the time that I have studied the Arab world. But I do not see the revolution as having triumphed.

Since the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, I have been traveling in Amman, Ramallah, and Nablus. My initial but overwhelming impression is that Egyptian events have inspired a wave of elation and hope that is both deep and wide and that dissipates only the closer one gets to positions of political authority. The Egyptian revolution has captivated audiences and inspired a sense of endless new possibilities. Whether it is a “new dawn” or “a dividing point in history” (as I heard it described by Jordanians and Palestinians across the political spectrum), Egyptians are seen as having brought down a rotten system as they begin to write their own future. The only question is how other Arabs (and maybe even Iranians) can join them. I am not yet so sure.

It is not that the old regime still remains (though it does; the junta and the cabinet are both still staffed by pre-revolutionary appointees and only vague hints of a cabinet reshuffle have been floated). It is clear that real change of some kind will take place. But the shape of the transition has not yet been defined. A more democratic, pluralistic, participatory, public-spirited, and responsive political system is a real possibility. But so is a kinder, gentler, presidentially-dominated, liberalized authoritarianism.

The danger of indefinite military rule in Egypt is small. While pundits have often proclaimed the military to be the real political power in Egypt

since 1952, in fact the political role for the military has been restricted for a generation. And there is no sign that the junta wants to change that for long. It is order, not power that they seem to seek. When the generals suspended the constitution, most opposition elements saw that as a positive step because it made possible far-reaching change, and I think that was a correct political judgment. (The suspension led to odd headlines in international press referring to Egypt as now being under martial law. But Egypt has been under martial law with only brief interruptions since 1939. It was not the generals who placed Egypt under martial law; that step was taken by King Farouk.)

But if the suspension of the constitution allowed the possibility of fundamental change, it did not require it. Indeed, the transition as defined by Egypt's junta seems both extremely rushed and very limited. The generals have made no move to share power and made only limited attempts to consult. They have appointed a committee to amend the constitution—and promptly limited its mandate to six articles and the time frame of its work to 10 days. The junta has thus ruled out fundamental political change—at least for now.

The ambiguous nature of the junta's commitment to change is perfectly illustrated by the committee it appointed. All of the members have technical expertise, and only one is identified with a particular political tendency. Some of the members are judges very closely identified with the old regime. But the committee is headed by Tariq al-Bishri, a major figure in Egyptian public life. It also includes some figures who are known for their critical and oppositional stances. The articles slated for amendment are largely connected with Egypt's electoral system.

The main exception is one of enormous symbolic but limited practical importance. Article 179, a product of the authoritarian 2007 constitutional amendments, was part of a process of entrenching the supposedly extraordinary measures of Egypt's state of emergency into the constitutional text itself. Repealing article 179 will arrest that process but it will not end either the state of emergency or the emergency law that made it possible; indeed, the legal basis for Egyptian emergency measures was laid by the British even before the country became independent. Authoritarianism in Egypt has deep legal roots, and the committee will not be able to weed much of that

legal infrastructure within 10 days.

But if the committee's mandate is limited, it is not meaningless. It will presumably lay the basis for cleaner elections (by bringing back judicial monitoring, an idiosyncratic way of administering elections, but one that has real credibility for Egyptians) and allowing a truly open field for presidential elections.

The decree appointing the committee suggests a quick sequence of elections: first a referendum on the amendments, then parliamentary elections, and then presidential elections. If the political changes stopped there, Egypt would have a significantly different system. The 1971 constitution would work much differently if there is no single dominant regime political party and if there is true pluralism in the parliament. But the system would still be supremely presidential, and many authoritarian features written deeply into the Egyptian constitutional and legal systems would remain. At worst, the result would look like a more mild and liberalized version of the existing system. At best, it might resemble a "delegative democracy" in which voters periodically elect a president who dominates the political system until his term has expired, when he is replaced by a similarly dominant successor.

But would Egypt stop there? It is quite possible that it would; moments when dramatic political and constitutional change is contemplated are rare, and this one may pass. Temporary constitutions have a way of becoming permanent quite quickly. Further change would depend on a constitutional amendment process that could be dominated by the newly elected parliament and president. And they might not want to rewrite the rules that brought them into office.

The possibility of a stalled revolution is real. But three factors make me optimistic that Egyptians might push farther. First, there is a very wide political consensus that far more comprehensive change is needed and considerable consensus on what that change would look like.

Second, the revolution has already shown that it can hardly be restricted to Tahrir Square. Not only were the demonstrations nationwide, but the revolution is now being played out in a whole host of Egyptian institutions—unions, professional associations, and media outlets, as figures associated with the old regime are tossed out. The Egypt that the generals rule now may be rapidly becoming a different place.

Third, the revolution of the youth has set off a spirit of hopefulness and activism that will be difficult to contain, in Egypt or throughout the region. The leaders of Egypt's old regime—and regimes across the Middle East—may try to outfox or outlast the challenge, but they are clearly on the defensive for the first time in the lives of those who now threaten the traditional rules of politics.

The 2011 Egyptian revolution was not the country's first mass popular uprising. In 1919, a remarkably similar series of events occurred, that time aimed against the British occupation of the country. A nationwide uprising, one that spread so quickly and reached so widely that it took its supposed leaders completely by surprise, made it impossible for the British occupiers to govern the country. The 1919 revolution had permanent and real effects—it preempted attempts to incorporate Egypt more fully into the British Empire and led the British instead to allow the country partial independence. But the incomplete nature of that independence, coupled with an imperfect constitutional system that tried to mix a monarchy with a parliamentary system, meant that many of the hopes of 1919 were not realized.

We will learn throughout the coming months whether Egypt's 2011 revolution will betray a similar pattern of real but limited change. If it is only limited change, that will still be an improvement for Egypt. But the hopes of other peoples in the region are for something more far-reaching. And whatever differences may exist, for the first time in a generation, Arab societies look to Egypt for hope and inspiration.

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THE TYRANT IS DEAD, BUT WHAT ABOUT HIS TYRANNY?

BY MOHAMMED AYOUB

Hosni Mubarak has gone and the military high command in Egypt has taken over power in his stead. In hindsight it appears that the military top brass very cleverly choreographed Mubarak's removal in order to achieve two ends. First, by distancing itself from the crumbling authority of the president it aimed to demonstrate to the protesters that the military was not opposed to their demands and aspirations. Second, by permitting a certain amount of anarchy in Cairo and elsewhere it intended to create enough fear of chaos among the general public that the latter would come to appreciate the Army's role as the keeper of order in the last resort.

The crowds in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt have a right to be euphoric; after all, they have done the unthinkable and brought down the pharaoh in just 18 days. However, it will be a tragedy if such euphoria turns into complacency. Despite the conciliatory rhetoric emanating from the military brass, the officer corps as an institution continues to have a vested interest in the political and economic power structure created and preserved by the regime under Anwar Sadat and Mubarak. To expect the military to relinquish its corporate interests for the sake of popular welfare is likely to turn out to be delusion.

The hard task of bringing the military under civilian and democratic control begins now with the departure of Mubarak. One should not underestimate either the staying power of the military or its capacity to seek revenge on those who attempt to force it out of the political arena. It took

Turkey 60 years, from 1950 to 2010—from the first democratic elections to the Ergenekon affair—to impose a respectable amount of civilian control over the military. The path was anything but easy. There were four military coups (three hard and one soft), the execution of a prime minister, the repeated banning of political parties unpalatable to the military brass, and even a threat as late as 2007 that the military may stage a coup if Abdullah Gul was elected president of the republic. Democratic consolidation is not an easy task, and Egyptian politicians and the general public if they are committed to achieving genuine democracy must be ready to pay the price that such an endeavor is likely to entail.

The military-dominated Egyptian power structure is replicated in many other countries in the region, with Syria and Algeria being the prime examples. One should not forget that the Syrian rulers killed 20,000 of their own citizens in Hama in 1982 to avert a challenge to the Assad regime. The Algerian military by aborting the 1992 elections let loose a reign of terror in that country from which it has not recovered until this day. The Jordanian army ethnically cleansed Palestinian camps in 1970 to prevent the fall of the Hashemite monarchy. Arab armies are very efficient at ruthlessly suppressing the democratic aspirations of their peoples. So much of their energy is devoted to the task of regime preservation that it detracts gravely from their capacity as war-fighting machines as was clearly demonstrated by the defeats inflicted by Israel on the Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian armies in the 1967 war and on the Egyptian and Syrian armies in the 1973 war.

Democratic consolidation requires the total withdrawal of the military from the political arena. Democracy in the true sense of the term will remain a mirage as long as the military is seen as the guarantor of law and order and/or as the agent for political transition. The only transition that the military brass likes is the transition of power to itself. The democracy activists in Egypt must learn this lesson quickly; otherwise the gains they have made will soon be frittered away. The tyrant may be dead, but tyranny is lurking around the corner.

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THE END OF THE BEGINNING

BY DAVID A. BELL

There are, of course, many different ways of categorizing historical revolutions. But for the purposes of understanding what is happening in the Arab world—and the challenges it may pose for the United States—one simple, rough distinction may be especially useful. This is the distinction between revolutions that look more like 1688 and revolutions that look more like 1789. The first date refers to England’s “Glorious Revolution,” in which the Catholic, would-be absolute monarch James II was overthrown and replaced by the Protestant William and Mary and the English Parliament claimed powerful and enduring new forms of authority. The second is, of course, the date of the French Revolution, which began as an attempt to create a constitutional monarchy but ultimately led to the execution of King Louis XVI, the proclamation of the First French Republic, and the Reign of Terror.

A key feature of 1688-type revolutions is their relative brevity. They may be preceded by lengthy periods of discontent, agitation, protest, and even violence, but the revolutionary moment itself generally lasts for only a few months (as in 1688 itself), or even weeks or days. A regime reaches a point of crisis and falls. The consolidation of a new regime itself may well involve much more turmoil and bloodshed, and eventually entail considerable political and social change—but these later events are not considered part of the revolution itself, and there is no sense of an ongoing revolutionary process. Men and women do not define themselves as active “revolutionaries” (in 1688, in fact, the English noun and adjective “revolutionary” did not yet exist—it only came into frequent use after 1789).

Revolutions of the 1789 type are quite different. Their leaders and sup-

porters see regime change as only the beginning of an arduous, ambitious process of political, social, and cultural transformation that may require years, even decades, to complete. For them, the revolution is not a discrete event, but an ongoing cause. They eagerly define themselves as “revolutionaries” and even speak of the “permanent revolution.” Revolutions of this type generally have much stronger utopian tendencies than the others and more frequently lead to large-scale violence. They also tend to have ambitions that overflow national boundaries—the local revolution becomes seen as just part of a process of worldwide emancipation. In some cases, revolutions of this type may be driven from the start by a self-consciously revolutionary party, committed to radical upheaval. In other cases (such as 1789 itself), it may seem to start off as a more limited event, only to change its character as particular groups grow frustrated with the results and the opposition they have encountered, and conclude that far broader, deeper forms of change are called for.

Historically, 1688-type revolutions have been much more common: France in 1830, Germany in 1918, China in 1911-12, and many of the revolutions of 1848 (of which most ended in failure). 1789-type revolutions, by contrast, have been relative historical rarities: above all, 1789 itself, Russia in 1917, China in 1949, Cuba in 1959. They are not, however, necessarily revolutions of the left. One could also include in this category the Nazi seizure of power in Germany (which Hitler termed a “National Revolution”) and Iran in 1979. The American Revolution, it could be argued, represents something of a hybrid case—closer to 1688, yet with important features of the other type, thanks to the long process of consolidation and contestation that followed independence.

In recent years, it seems as if the 1789 type of revolution has lost its appeal for most of the world. During the greatest series of political upheavals in recent times—the collapse of communism—most leaders of the victorious reform movements rejected the word “revolution” altogether. The Polish Solidarity leader Jacek Kuron went so far as to write in the summer of 1989, apropos of the French Revolution’s bicentennial, that Poland did not want a revolution because revolutions spill too much blood. Germans refer to the events of 1989 as the “Turning,” not the “Revolution.” It was, above all, in Czechoslovakia that the word “revolution” came to describe what hap-

pened in 1989, but paired with the word “velvet” to underscore the differences from the great revolutions of the past.

Of course, revolutions have hardly disappeared since 1989. But the recent wave of them across the world—the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the recent events in Tunisia—all look much more like 1688 than 1789. They have been short, sharp affairs, centered on the fall of a regime. In none of these countries have we seen the development of an extended “revolutionary” process or party. And though some of these revolutions have triggered others, domino-style, as in 1848, they have not themselves been expansionary and proselytizing. As far as I know, there are no Tunisian revolutionaries directing events in Cairo.

The principal exception to the current pattern—the one great contemporary revolution of the second type to remain an ongoing proposition today—is Iran. Although it has been more than 30 years since the fall of the Shah, Iran’s Islamic Republic is still a revolutionary regime in a way matched by few other states in the world today. Despite its considerable unpopularity with its own people, it has remained committed since 1979 to the enactment of radical, even utopian change, and not just inside its own borders. Organizations such as the Revolutionary Guard retain considerable importance.

Egypt, interestingly enough, experienced a revolution close to the 1789 type in its relatively recent history. The so-called Revolution of 1952 that overthrew the country’s monarchy and brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power ultimately involved a great deal more than regime change. Nasser had broad ambitions both for remaking Egyptian society and for taking his revolutionary movement beyond Egypt’s own borders (most strikingly, in the creation of the short-lived United Arab Republic). Ironically, Hosni Mubarak spent much of his military career in the service of Nasser’s revolutionary regime. But well before Mubarak came to power, following the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, Egypt’s revolutionary energies had largely dissipated.

The fundamental question being discussed by commentators at present is what shape a new Egyptian revolution might take, now that Mubarak’s regime has fallen and the military has intervened while promising elections in six months’ time. Will the upheaval come to a quick end with the establishment of a new government—hopefully a democratic one—or will a

much more radical, long-lasting revolutionary process develop? In other words, will things look more like 1688 or 1789? Anxieties focus not on a resurgent Nasserism, of course, but rather on the Muslim Brotherhood and the possibility that Egypt may experience its own Islamic revolution, with unpredictable consequences, not only for the country itself but for the region and the world.

Against these anxieties, many commentators have been pointing to the lack of ingredients, at present, for such a turn of events. Cairo in 2011, they insist, is not Tehran in 1979. They argue that the crowds protesting Mubarak called above all for democracy and expressed little enthusiasm for an Islamic Republic. They characterize the Muslim Brotherhood, despite its long and radical history, as a relatively ineffective organization that has recently moved in more moderate directions and that lacks a charismatic leader like Ayatollah Khomeini. In short, they are effectively arguing, the signs point to 1688, not to 1789.

This analysis may well be accurate. But the history of revolutions suggests that even if it is, the long-term outlook in Egypt is still a highly unstable one. This is not only because events are hard to predict once they start moving at revolutionary velocity, but because revolutions of the 1789 type do not always start out as such. Hardly anyone at the start of the French Revolution could have predicted the demise of the French monarchy and the Reign of Terror. There were no Jacobins present at the fall of the Bastille in 1789, only future Jacobins. France's turn to radicalism took place after the Bastille had been taken, within the revolutionary process itself—between 1789 and 1793. Similarly, Russia's February Revolution of 1917 initially looked to most observers like 1688: a short, sharp crisis that led to the fall of a monarch, and the quick foundation of a constitutional regime. While Bolsheviks were already present, few observers foresaw the October Revolution that would bring Lenin to power.

Egypt probably does not face the prospect of an Islamic Revolution in the next few months. But if Mubarak is replaced by a weak, unstable series of governments that cannot restore order or deliver serious social and economic reforms—and thus quickly lose credibility and legitimacy among the population—then a different, far more radical revolutionary movement may yet develop. And despite the current lack of a charismatic leader for such a

movement, one could quickly emerge out of the torrent of events. In July 1789, Maximilien Robespierre and Georges Danton were unknown lawyers; Jean-Paul Marat an unknown doctor, known to most of his acquaintances as something of a crackpot. Within four years, they had emerged as leaders of the most radical revolution yet seen in history.

So the crucial point to keep in mind is that even in the best-case scenario, with Mubarak replaced by a seemingly stable, democratic, secular government, the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 may still just be getting started. Its crucial moments may lie months, or even years, in the future. It is after Mubarak's fall that American support for Egypt's democratic forces will be most important. And the last thing anyone should do, if Egypt appears to complete a revolution this year that looks like 1688, is to breathe a sigh of relief. At the end of 2011, Mohamed ElBaradei may well be president of a democratic Egypt. But then, at the end of 1789, Louis XVI was still King of France.

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